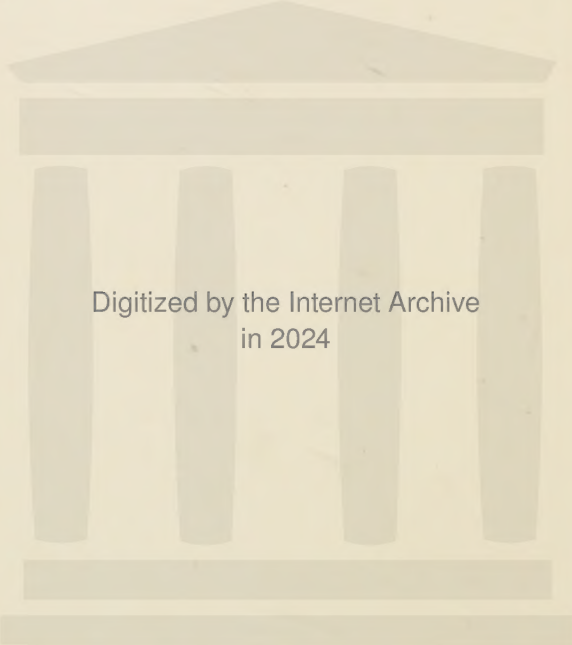


CLEO'S MISTY RAINBOW



BY LILIAN GARIS



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

CLEO'S MISTY RAINBOW



"I'M JUST CRAZY ABOUT IT—ALL HERE," CLEO DECLARED,
"AND I'M GOING TO JOIN."

Cleo's Misty Rainbow.

Frontispiece—(Page 265)

CLEO'S MISTY RAINBOW

By

LILIAN GARIS

Author of

"JOAN'S GARDEN OF ADVENTURE," "GLORIA AT
BOARDING SCHOOL," "CONNIE LORING'S AMBITION,"
"BARBARA HALE: A DOCTOR'S DAUGHTER," "BARBARA HALE
AND COZETTE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
THELMA GOOCH

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS : : NEW YORK

Made in the United States of America

Books by
LILIAN GARIS

JOAN: JUST GIRL
JOAN'S GARDEN OF ADVENTURE
GLORIA: A GIRL AND HER DAD
GLORA AT BOARDING SCHOOL
CONNIE LORING'S AMBITION
CONNIE LORING'S DILEMMA
BARBARA HALE: A DOCTOR'S DAUGHTER
BARBARA HALE AND COZETTE
CLEO'S MISTY RAINBOW

COPYRIGHT, 1927, BY
GROSSET & DUNLAP

Cleo's Misty Rainbow

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	THE LITTLE REBEL	1
II	A MISTY RAINBOW	10
III	BE IT EVER SO HUMBLE	21
IV	GLORIOUS PROSPECTS	33
V	THE LADY-CLOUD	48
VI	WHEN NELLIE STAYED ALL NIGHT	61
VII	TOMMY'S FLOWER SHOWER	71
VIII	UNEXPECTED	86
IX	THE IMPROMPTU	100
X	SIGHTSEEING	113
XI	THE REACTION	123
XII	WHAT THE GROWN-UPS THOUGHT	135
XIII	THE GREAT ADVENTURE	149
XIV	A LOST CAUSE	162
XV	THE BEST OF GOOD NEWS	176
XVI	AUNT SYLVIA'S RETREAT	187
XVII	CONFIDENCES	202
XVIII	LITTLE DETECTIVES	215
XIX	THE SECRET REVEALED	227
XX	STARTLING	242
XXI	THE ADOPTION OF KATHLEEN	251
XXII	BESIDE THE POOL	262

CLEO'S MISTY RAINBOW

CHAPTER I

THE LITTLE REBEL

THE little ivory clock ticked away precious seconds but the girl on the rug ignored them. She might have been a Chinese maiden sprung to life from the memories woven in the blue and yellow carpet, or she might have been a living idol smuggled there in its valued, unmatched handiwork. Instead she was only Cleo, a little American girl, too much pampered to be happy.

Her embroidered silken robe blended in with the oriental rug as she sat huddled, knees up and arms clasped to hold them there, her blonde head resting atop her pretty face hidden beneath. She was very tiny, merely a little hump of embroidery with the daisy head protruding, and to make the scene more perfect still, there wafted from a Chinese jade image on its throne near the ivory

clock, the faintest odor of incense. Dadu, her god of good luck, was breathing hard his perfumed breath just now, for time was going and the clock couldn't rouse her. Dadu threw a whip of smoke straight out, then curled it into a vapory lash, but the child didn't seem to care. The clock emphasized every tick until its little heart fluttered, but still the girl on the rug dreamed idly.

Finally a human sound broke in and a door was softly opened. Indifferently Cleo raised her head from its perch, a little sigh escaped her pretty lips, and the next moment, in sheer revolt, she fell flat on the oriental carpet, stuck her sandaled feet out like exclamation points, and threw her bare arms out straight to finger tips, in tense defiance.

"Cleo dear," muttered a voice. "Your hair!"

"I know, Zita, it's always my hair, or my skin or my figure. But what about me?"

Zita, the maid thus addressed, glanced lovingly at the pretty rebel, then she stood over the prostrate figure and offered two bribing hands.

"Come, dear, it's time to——"

"Oh, don't say it, Zita, please don't." The two hands brought the girl to her feet without a bend. "There, I'll do it, but don't say it. I was

just dreaming that I didn't have to dress for—a million years!"

"And your hair was so pretty today," said Zita, with a gentle pat and no heed to the girl's wild dream. "Are you sure you don't want it to grow just a little longer?"

"I don't, I don't, I don't!" Each "don't" was given with a vigorous head shake. "And if all my own curl goes out I wouldn't blame it. Everything real must be made unreal, so it will appear very real, to make people think I'm pretty." There was scorn in the words as sandals were kicked off, the silk robe fell, and a girlish figure, so childish it looked babyish, stood revealed in the daintiest of silk garments.

Zita placed a soft boudoir scarf over the bare shoulders and Cleo sank to her stool before the long mirror; but the face reflected met no welcome greeting.

"Some day," the girl told Zita, "I am just going to run away. See if I don't."

"Aren't you spoiled, dear? Just think of all you have."

"I don't want to and I don't want it. All I have I must make use of, parade it. Other girls can be natural but I must be always fussing." Her head wagged at itself in the glass.

"Don't you feel well today?" The hair was now being patted into a glorious halo by Zita's loving hands.

"That's just it, Zita. I feel so well I'm on a strike. I want to run away and see people without following around like a pet poodle. Oh, I know I'm fortunate and all that, and I do love you, Zita" (the unfinished head leaned against the arm that circled it), "but it's awful to live like this." Her petulance was pathetic. Cleo was meaning just what she was saying.

"And you are such a baby." There was just a moment of unfeigned affection. The woman who stood behind this elfin child drew her into her arms, and Cleo sighed with the sigh of the little society girl.

"If you were my child," Zita breathed. Then, the ivory clock tinkled its call, and the skilled hands of the maid fell to their task.

"Tell me, Zita, what would we do if I were your daughter?" Unconsciously the lithe form slumped into a more confidential position, and the fingers stroking Cleo's dainty arm streaked down sharply with the sudden jolt.

"We haven't much time, Cleo dear," Zita murmured, "and your Aunt Sylvia left—all sorts of orders."

"Of course she did. Aunt Sylvia loves orders next best to show-off," grumbled Cleo. "Go on, Zita, tell me a true story. You know how I love them."

"A true story," repeated the maid, thoughtfully. "Little girl, I am afraid you are becoming—cynical."

"If you mean sour," answered the child, "I really am getting awfully sour, Zita. I don't like things this way. I just hate that poky dancing class."

"But you do like funny red-headed Shamus, don't you?"

"Oh, I love him," and again emotion threatened the dressing process, for Cleo's shoulders moved up and down, her hands clapped with a snap and her two silk-stockinged feet went right up to the first drawer of the ivory dressing table. "And Zita," exclaimed the child, "I almost found out about his name. You know I always thought it came from Shamrock. Half the folks call him Clover, a lot of others call him Green, and I call him Shammy. But his name is really Shamus, and he has the dearest, funniest fat mother, who just breathes in laughs and talks in jokes—real Irish. I have more fun with Shammy," and she

laughed away all the irony she had been conjuring up a moment before.

"You didn't like the little black boy——"

"Oh, no. The little coon was so slow and sort of sneaky. I always felt he peeked in the key hole before he knocked to call us to class. Really, he didn't, but he had that way of seeming to be in places without coming. You know Miss Allison, the fancy dancer, made more fuss about that black boy always being 'under her feet' she called it. I think that's why we got Shammy. Miss Allison likes white boys best. Of course the teacher only sends them to call when we're late. We have Shammy's mother most of the time."

"And you found out his name is really Shamus," went on Zita. "It should be O'Brien, shouldn't it?"

"But it isn't. It's the queerest name I ever heard. I wrote it on my blue slipper; when you finish I'll get it. Sort of a melanthropy, or something like that," Cleo attempted.

"There; we are ready for the new little school dress, now, dear. I like that little dress; it makes you look as you used to before we came to the city." The one-piece serge dress, that was to make Cleo over into a real day-scholar of a make-

believe day-school, was slipped on over the cropped blonde head. It was a very little Peter Pan dress, with a small red necktie; and when the simple costume was completely arranged, Cleo really looked like a ten-year-old girl, although she owned to several more years than ten.

"Let me get the blue slipper with Shammy's name," she pleaded, intent upon the joys of childhood.

"But just see the time, dear——"

"I know. It won't take a minute and I want to call it to him when he calls me."

The contents of a leather bag were "dumped" unceremoniously upon the Chinese rug. "There, here it is," Cleo cried. "Just listen to this spelling. M-a-lanaphy. Isn't that a queer name for Irish? Sounds like the Greek fruit man's. But Shamus Malanaphy!" A laugh finished the oration. Just wait till I call that back at him when he gives me a knock," she chuckled mischievously.

"That will be fun," agreed the considerate Zita. "Now, Cleo, be sure to keep your cloak on until you get in your dressing room. Your Aunt Sylvia warned me to tell you——"

"Aunt Sylvia!" The name threatened disaster again, for Cleo's face clouded and Shamus was quickly forgotten. "Do you know, Zita, I

can't love her even the little bit I used to? She is so dreadfully fussy about how I look, and how I act, and how well I can keep; but she never dreams of how I feel—in my heart, you know. I was thinking it all over this afternoon, and, Zita," with a loving tug at the white linen arm, "why doesn't she ever let you come with me? All the other girls take their own maids when they have them."

"I know, dear, but——"

"So do I know, dear, but——" The words were uttered with a precision at once natural and dramatic. "And I also know she's just jealous and afraid——" she stopped, the sentence left dangling.

But presently she was lost in her fur wraps, and the elevator waited to receive her and Zita. The next moment she was carefully handed into a waiting taxi. Zita gave some instructions to the trusted driver, and Cleo gaily blew a little kiss to the watching woman as the car sped off.

Back in the luxurious apartment Zita Brady dropped the blue serge cloak and with it her courage. She sank down before the mirror lately vacated, and picked up the blue satin slipper with that funny name scribbled on the sole.

"Poor little dear," she murmured. "Poor

little Cleo! And she is already rebelling." The silk stockings were smoothed out and folded carefully. "What will become of her if she rebels so soon?" Again the mirror foiled her mood. "And she thinks Sylvia is jealous!" Just the hint of a mirthless laugh followed that. Each clause completed a thought, but bitterness trailed throughout. For some moments the young woman sat there. She pushed the mimic cap off her splendid brown hair and she flashed eyes trained to submission.

Then the faithful ivory clock chimed the hour, and the Chinese rug was cleared of Cleo's shedded garments.

"I'm glad she has something to make her laugh," reflected the young woman, spelling out the queer name on the slipper, "and I must see the boy's mother. I have an idea I could trust Mrs. Malanaphy with looking after Cleo. One cannot trust, always, the hired women who have no personal interest."

Zita paused. "It's all so foolish," she presently continued to argue with herself, "this thing of trying to make a *perfect* young lady of her. As if the charms of girlhood could be improved upon," and she sighed rather hopelessly.

CHAPTER II

A MISTY RAINBOW

LITTLE girls are not the only persons subject to day dreams, nor do they alone follow fairy haunts through city streets and in crowded dwellings.

When Cleo returned from her dancing lesson she surprised a dreaming Zita, still there in the pretty room where the ivory clock ticked implacably; although the little Chinese god had ceased to smoke his perfumed incense.

"So soon!" exclaimed the young woman, smiling happily as the girl suddenly appeared before her.

"Soon! It's been ages; it grows longer every single time," and the handsome cloak was dropped with utter disregard of all the training Aunt Sylvia had insisted upon continually giving.

"No fun? Wasn't Shamus there?" Zita's day dreams were now rudely dispelled in her attention to the rebellious girl.

"Oh, yes. He was there, but he didn't get a chance to speak to me. You just ought to see the other girls stare when I so much as say hello to him." Slippers flew off, and the scarf that hid her yellow hair was madly waved in the air, while Cleo gave vent to her exuberance. She looked prettier than ever in her natural girlish abandon, and not even the prudent restraint of Zita could dampen her noisy outburst. She sang, she danced and she wound up with a moan. Then she made amends with a swoop upon the indulgent attendant.

"You are such a dear, Zita. And I do have splendid times when the tyrant is away."

"Cleo!" Feigned surprise and indignation choked the little word. "Your Aunt Sylvia is surely very kind, and always gives you the best of everything."

"You don't mean a single word you say, Zita-Wita. She is so kind it is unkind, and she is so attentive it hurts." The yellow head fell closer into the "snug" between Zita's ear and shoulder. "Tell me honestly, Wita, is she really, truly my aunt?"

"Yes, she is, dear. Your father's sister."

"But no relation to my mother——"

The woman in the big armchair sighed and

held her pretty charge closer. "I never met any of your father's family until I—came to take care of you. Your mother and I were girls together."

"Do you know what I want more than anything else in the world, Zita-Wita?"

"What, dearest?"

"I want you to tell me the sweetest story all over again."

"What time must you be at the party this evening?"

"Not until eight. Isn't it silly to have a party from eight until nine-thirty?"

"Then, you just tumble into bed now and rest and I'll fetch your beef tea. And a little later we will have a cozy supper——"

"If you tell the story," Cleo bargained.

"What a hungry little story girl you are——"

"But I have to live on them—just those you tell me. Other girls can go out and make their own stories——"

"Very well, you do your part and I'll do mine," agreed the companion, anxious to divert dissension.

Like a beautiful little bird Cleo shook herself free from "loose feathers," that tumbled into a perfumed ring of fine clothing about her feet, then she settled down in the nest that Zita's hands

made ready for her. Somehow today Cleo seemed to guard a secret. From the time she was aroused from her manikin dream on the Chinese rug, until now, when the first half of her day's irksome duties were over, that air of mystery grinned through her expression of elaborate indifference. Zita sensed it and felt obliged to fathom the new mood, for Cleo's caprice was not easily conquered. She was forever getting queer notions into her pretty head.

The lacy cap was gently placed over the yellow curls, and the dainty robe replaced her other wearables, but two blue eyes sparkled like bluebells in early spring, and the pretty face looked eagerly up to Zita for that "sweetest story."

"Won't you tell me a little about this afternoon?" coaxed Cleo's companion. She felt she ought to know about Cleo's experiences.

"Oh, surely, Zita, of course," replied the girl. "Well, it was a bit different because some boarding schoolgirls came in a crowd. I was glad, of course, but you know how jealous I am of all regular schoolgirls."

"Wasn't that lovely? Did you have the flower dance? What did you do with the flowers?"

"Don't you know? I thought I told you.

Shammy and I are in partnership. I give him all my flowers and he sells them. We are going to do something very secret with the money."

"Couldn't you take me in your company?" Zita coaxed.

"Not yet, Zita-Wita. It's too secret and Shammy warned me not to tell. But it isn't anything dangerous." This to offset the question gathering on Zita's lips.

"Has he sold many flowers yet?" Caution crept along with the words, for Zita was wise and pretended indifference. That little boy should not have taken Cleo's flowers, she reasoned.

"Oh, yes; quite a few. But Shammy is too—too funny!" A rippling laugh echoed through the apartment. "What do you think, Zit? He was on his way to the place he sells them when he met a Polish woman crying and wringing her hands, and acting most tragically. Shammy asked her what it was all about and she said her little girl had just died. Of course he gave her all the flowers, and the woman stopped crying instantly. The girls didn't care about them after the dance, and you know how foreigners love flowers at funerals."

"Yes," said Zita, hiding a smile.

"Haven't you ever noticed the carriages full

of paper flowers they have following the band at their funerals?" Cleo asked seriously.

"Oh, yes, indeed I have. But what about Shammy? You have a great time with him, don't you?" Zita wanted to make sure about the boy Cleo had chosen to be so friendly with.

"Wonderful. But I'm afraid he may go in the movies. He has such spectacular freckles," sighed Cleo.

"Just freckles?"

"But they're more valuable than talent; every one says so," her voice was deadly level.

"Perhaps with talent——"

"But Shammy is funnier than the funniest man you ever saw act. One day he and I were talking against rules, of course, when it came time for somebody's solo dance. The teacher was that cranky Mr. Blyn and he stalked out into the corridor almost on top of us. I was frightened that he would report me, but Shammy just turned to him and panted as if all out of breath. Then he explained he had heard a messenger call a name that sounded like Blyn and he rushed off for the message, but found it was for some one else. Mr. Blyn is so conceited he could only think of the possible message and forget all about us," and Cleo rolled like a cocoon in the silken comforter

and squeaked with delight at the thought of Shammy's trick.

"But that wasn't honest," charged the young woman.

"Honest? You don't know Shammy. Everything he does is so honest it shines. He did see a messenger talking to the String Bean and he was looking for Quinn and that isn't far off from Blyn," declared Cleo, loyally.

"The String Bean? Isn't that slangy, Cleo?"

"No, it's literal. That piano player is so long and slim and green that String Bean just suits him. Shammy thought of it, of course," admitted Cleo.

"I know how you hate home preaching and home teaching, Cleo," remonstrated Zita this time, "but I'm afraid I cannot approve of Shammy if he isn't a little more particular. Besides, why don't you make companions of the other girls in the class? There's that pretty little Norma Shelley. Surely she is real and not conceited. Then there's Marcella Woolton—she is always begging you to go places with her. And what about your own partner? She who is such a wonderful dancer?"

"That's Presto. I call her that but her name is Preston. I'm just crazy about her, Zita, and I'll have to tell you what good fun she is." The

head was jerked from a badly tumbled pillow and two knees shot a pyramid up beneath the quilts. "Zita, are you coming with me to-night?"

"Your Aunt Sylvia arranged to have Miss Cummings call for you at these late parties." There was a meaning precision in this reply.

"Aunt Sylvia!" groaned Cleo. "Do you know, Zit, I can just feel myself curdling—growing sour, you know. I perfectly loathe to be made such a baby of, and I'm ashamed to have Presto waiting on me as she does."

"Your aunt just chose her to make sure who your partner would be, Cleo." Again the tones were metallic.

"But why on earth do I have to keep on the everlasting drill and exercise? Shammy has seen me at practice and he says I could climb out that window and drop just as safely as any one could," and a pretty little puckered pout threatened further outbursts.

"Perhaps you could, dear, but why? You don't have to do anything like that."

"But I want to. I like dancing," admitted the girl, "but I like real athletics better. Of course they don't call the work athletics, but it is, just the same," Cleo decided belligerently. "I must

tell you about the charity play. It's supposed to be in the early evening, and Jim, the light man, has some new trick that makes clouds and the woodland house is in a black shadow when Presto climbs out on the roof and drops," explained Cleo. "But don't you see, Zita, I'll feel like such a fraud when the applause comes, and when I let her do that part at rehearsal today I just felt silly."

"Well, you must not do anything dangerous," insisted Zita who had just brought the beef tea tray and was now offering the savory refreshment to Cleo.

"But I could do that slide off the roof just as well as not," argued Cleo. "I just have to change places with Presto. I beg that the prince be released from his royal bondage." A low laugh interrupted the confidence. "You know, Zita, it's too funny. My prince is the liveliest, wildest little scamp—in the whole play, and when I make that speech I always want to say things aside. He grins behind his face all the while and when we come off he capers until he is caught at it. Today he asked me if he couldn't beg me free for a little skating at the Casino, and when I said I had lessons tomorrow morning he wanted to know who was the captive, really. He was mak-

ing fun of me being afraid to take the slide. And I'm not a bit afraid."

A half-stifled sigh escaped as the first sip of beef tea crossed Cleo's lips.

"You must rest now, dear," coaxed her attendant. "I have let you talk a full hour and you will be all tired out."

"But my story, Zita. You promised——"

"Yes; take your broth and I'll begin," agreed Zita.

"Don't leave out the prettiest part. I want to hear exactly how the baby was left in the silken-lined basket on the rich lady's doorstep——"

"But that is so true, dearest, and it brings up sad memories," murmured the young woman as shadows crossed her face.

"I know, Zita-Wita, but please, just this once. I have a particular reason, that is, I particularly want to hear a real, true human story tonight. You know our English teacher says we must feel these things if we expect to write about them intelligently." A sly little tug at Zita's sleeve explained more fully.

Wistful, pleading eyes begged still more potently, and when the tray was removed a yellow head sunk like a tired daisy on its fragile

stem, and Zita, the devoted, began again the "sweetest story."

It seemed unreal, like a story, that a little girl in a big city should be leading so artificial a life, but the realest part of it was the girl's own attitude. She hated it all. She was born for freedom but was only getting all this. Dancing lessons, fancy plays apologized for in the name of some accommodating little charity, the prettiest girl, Cleo, having the leading part, and the smartest boy, no doubt, being made her prince. What absurdity!

But her Aunt Sylvia had high social ambitions for the motherless girl, and all this was included in the preliminary schedule.

CHAPTER III

BE IT EVER SO HUMBLE

IN a very different quarter of that self-same, busy city, Nellie Glennon was petting the finest kind of newly ironed lingerie into life-like shapes. Her brown head perked first this way and then that; her restless lips first hummed and then whistled, and her almost reverent fingers caressed piece after piece of the fragile, dainty wearables, fresh from the skilled handling of Mrs. Glennon, the busy woman who took time to smile at her little daughter's adulation.

"Can you see yourself in those, Nellie dear?" she asked, as the girl at the snowy table beamed upon some butterfly slumber sets.

"No, I can't, Momsey, but I can see Cleo in them. May I deliver this week?"

"Not alone, but you may come with me if you get all your home work done in time."

"Why can't I ever go alone?"

"And have some one grab the suitcase? No,

little girl. I don't carry that sort of insurance," and a good-natured sway of her rather generously proportioned body, surged like a wave of humor over the woman at the ironing board.

"Timmie would go with me," argued Nellie, not to be joked out of her wish.

"And Timmie is the best little target in the whole neighborhood. Where he goes, peggin' follows. Did you see his left cheek lately?" An emphatic thud of the iron added eloquence to this question.

"That was all on account of a cat. You know Timmie just loves cats," Nellie answered decidedly.

"Yes, I know, daughter. Tim is a good-natured little chap, and I'll warrant, half his fights come from that feature of his make-up. All the same, he would do battle quick enough if any one of the lazy lads at the corner took a cross-eyed squint at your nice fat suitcase." Another violent thud of the iron settled definitely the status of Cleo's pajama pocket which Mrs. Glennon was finishing.

"And I can't ever go alone?" Nellie whimpered. The tabulated list was increased by one half dozen handkerchiefs marked "C," Nellie noted carefully.

"Now, I'm getting suspicious, Nellie Glennon. You have a secret," declared the mother, tightening her lips in mock severity.

"The idea, Momsey. How foolish you talk!" Nellie's voice was on par with her table cover, smooth and flat and colorless. "You know very well I just love to go to Cleo's. She's always so nice to me." Brown eyes blinked suspiciously.

"That's what the laws are for; keepin' people nice," retorted Mrs. Glennon, bantering the little girl's evasion. "All the same of course, Cleo is just naturally nice. But she can't help that either. Didn't I know her pretty mother when I worked at the Rolavard? And there wasn't one in the hotel as kind all 'round as Winnie Kimball. It was an awful pity she was taken away——" The sentence was left unfinished.

"But Miss Sylvia? She isn't so nice. I'm not crazy about delivering when she's home. She counts everything twice, and looks, and pecks and snoops, until I feel like a shoplifter. Cleo says she is awful fussy always," declared Nellie, anxious to substantiate her own opinion.

"She's on the father's side and I guess you're right. She's something of a screw," the mother agreed. "But I don't mind her, and I don't want you to, Nellie. She could take this work

from us, you know, then where would we be?"

"Cleo wouldn't let her," argued Nellie. "She says we are real friends of hers and she seems to need real friends. Of course she has lots of society friends. All the rich girls go to see her."

"The child is only human, and I've seen lots like her in my own days. They get so they hate the artificial if they go at it too young. It's a good thing the law has stepped in and taken a hand at the age and the hours," declared Mrs. Glennon. "Of course the real aristocrats never did let their own children take on as poor little Cleo does. But you see, Nellie, it's her Aunt Sylvia's notion to make her as near perfect as she can," Mrs. Glennon grinned broadly as she said that.

"It's awful hard on Cleo, though," Nellie argued with real sincerity.

"It's too silly to last long," the mother replied, "and I'm just wondering how long Cleo will stand it."

Guilt, the kind that chokes and blinds and staggers was surging over Nellie. If her mother only knew!

She breathed hard and again smoothed out the lacy finery. Mrs. Glennon took a "fresh" iron and sighed as she did so. The garbage elevator

clattered and creaked, and the man down basement rattled the ropes inquiringly.

"Nothin' here!" called back the laundress automatically; then, tenement house silence filtered in again.

"Be careful with those little brassières," said Mrs. Glennon finally. "They're so tiny and the ribbons are so easily pulled out. It's a shame a child like Cleo should be strapped up in them."

"But everybody wears them with thin dresses," murmured Nellie. "I wish I had one for my voile."

"Maybe Lady Sylvia will open her heart and give you some things soon. There's quite a few pretty slips going mighty thin, and Zita always gets things for us when they begin to wear out," replied the mother hopefully.

"But we haven't had a thing in the longest while," Nellie murmured, sticking a treacherous finger through a weak spot in Cleo's valance edging.

"Don't they pay us well? What more can we ask? But, of course, there's no use giving good things to perfect strangers," Mrs. Glennon reasoned.

"Mother, was my daddy a real singer?" asked Nellie suddenly, reverting to the beloved subject.

"Well, I wouldn't exactly say he was a real singer," modified the widow, "but I will say he could sing. But if he'd had sense enough to take a good city job when it was offered him—well, we might be better off now," she concluded a little wistfully.

"But we mightn't," echoed Nellie.

"That's so too, we mightn't."

"Did he ever sing in a theatre?" Nellie loved her father's memory and was not easily satisfied with stories built around it.

"Yes, once I remember. But child—are we to finish these clothes or to go on wool gathering?" The iron came down with a slam that made an adjacent cup rattle on its saucer.

"We can work and talk, Momsey. Please tell me," begged the insatiable Nellie.

"I never saw the like of you for wanting to hear stories. You're as bad as you were at five or six, when your own handsome daddy used to tell the fairy tales. And couldn't he tell them?"

An expressive pause. Nellie waited for the mist to leave her mother's eyes, then asked timidly:

"But if he wasn't a real trained singer how ever did he get a chance?"

"My dear child," said Mrs. Glennon in a

mournful tone. "You don't know what a lord and master the stage carpenter can be. Next to the director I think he's the biggest man in the house. For if a little thing goes wrong with the fixings a whole play can be spoiled. I've seen it done." The woman with the cooling iron was back again to her task, but the child sorting and counting clean clothes had forgotten hers.

"Yes," went on the narrator, "if a pulley didn't pull up clean and land its piece of scenery in the flies, or if a 'flat' wouldn't slide, or if something went wrong with the roofs that hung from the gridiron—don't you see, Nellie, a whole set could be completely spoiled? But when your daddy was stage carpenter nothing ever did go wrong; that is, nothing that depended on his brains to operate," Mrs. Glennon finished with pride.

"I wish I lived then—that is, that I was big enough to remember some of that!" Nellie's voice echoed her mother's sentiments, and only the love of those memories hid from her mother the effect she was producing on her attentive audience.

"They were great days but——" A sigh served as cue for the labor at hand, and a fresh

iron was quickly substituted for the one grown cold.

"But, Momsey, about dad's singing? How did he get a chance to sing?"

"Well, you see, dear—but we'll be late with these things——"

"Oh, no, mother, please tell! I can work just as fast. Please tell!"

"Well, your daddy could pick up lines and tunes as easy as he could pick up tacks. Working about—he just seemed to gather up the parts, and you know singing can sometimes be copied pretty well. Then, when a singer in a small part gets suddenly too sick to sing——"

"A singer was taken sick and daddy took the part some one else belonged in?" Nellie was not to be diverted from the family's historic tree that sprouted singing.

"Now, child, it wasn't much. Singing must be studied for years, you know."

"But just that part, Momsey." Two warm little hands patted the cheeks flushed from exertion and from the extra heat rising above the ironing board.

"I know more stories, dearie, than could be told in a month of Sundays. But I can't blame you, darling, for wanting to know more about your

own good daddy," said Mrs. Glennon. The iron holder of rough ticking rescued a secret tear. Nellie waited obediently.

"The night I remember best was when the old Gaily Minstrel Company was giving concerts and one of the funny men didn't get there in time," the mother finally continued. "The curtain was held, and the manager was having a fit, and the orchestra had played everything they knew, but the singer wasn't there. I happened to be there, for your father often got passes."

"Oh moth-er! You never told me you were there."

"And I shouldn't; I wasn't; what was I telling you? where was I at?" Mrs. Glennon flustered excitedly.

"The singer didn't show up," prompted Nellie.

"No, he didn't, and I never saw a man chew as many cigars as Ben Gaily did in that half-hour wait. When, without a word or warning, there comes out onto the stage your own dad, Edward Glennon, all togged out in some of those crazy suits of tight jersey cloth like a union suit, and flippity-floppity capes, and sashes and rompers, all pleated and tucked up like collapsed balloons, you know. I'll tell you he was a treat to my

own eye; but the company didn't know him."

"Thought he was the real singer?"

"They did—some of them that were too excited to see straight. But, of course, Eagle Eye Gaily couldn't be fooled, in spite of the cigar bark he was lookin' over. But your daddy said he had the songs and the manager said he couldn't do worse than was being done, for folks out front were coughing their heads off, and the box office was puttin' up bars. But never a break did your daddy make in the part, and the minstrel play went on for the first part and half of the next, before the real singer got there, all out of breath and out of luck, for he had been hailed to a police court because his driver had been speeding. That was what held him."

"Then, why didn't daddy stick to singing?" pressed the determined Nellie.

"Didn't I tell you he was the best stage carpenter in New York state? There's plenty of singers but no manager is goin' to give up a good mechanic for a poor singer. Child alive, I don't want to see you Mary Pickfording around here, and I hope you won't go filling up your head with any truck," Mrs. Glennon commented, reasonably.

"Oh, I won't, mother," But even Nellie

smiled contentedly at the success of her little snare. She had now heard that her own folks were talented people. Her father could sing! Then why shouldn't she?

"How many more pieces are there in that basket? Tell me quick. I've been foolin' my time away," confessed her mother, moving impatiently to finish.

"Only the vests," announced Nellie, shaking out the bits of lisle that cuddled in the clothes basket. "And can we take them Saturday morning, when Cleo is home?"

"And have you swallow a lot more nonsense about—about people not in our class?" The linen in her hands was shaken with unwarranted violence as Mrs. Glennon said that.

"Oh, Cleo doesn't blow about things. She always tells me she would rather be in my place than be where she is," ventured Nellie, uncertainly.

"Easy to tell," quoth the industrious woman. "Well, I can't say, little girl, but I'd just as soon have you where you are."

But Nellie's busy little brain did not heed the maternal solicitude, and in the last of the dainty garments for Cleo she folded her own heart's best and dearest wish.

She also had a voice. Why couldn't she become a singer? Her teacher at school had praised her voice. She was given a solo for the new play.

But her mother should not be told of her ambition, Nellie knew. For singers and stage folks were not considered the best of company for poor little girls.

That was all Nellie knew about it, but it was not the only real reason why her mother discouraged her seemingly worthy ambition. Even mothers have their secrets, haven't they?

CHAPTER IV

GLORIOUS PROSPECTS

"You will be free today, Cleo. I know how glad you are of that. No lessons and no parties."

"You couldn't know, Zita, for I'm as glad as glad. After all, I guess the laws do know best. I heard some of the girls say last night that children's plays even for charities are being investigated. So many hours away from school, you know. Some of the girls said yesterday that the truant officers are taking addresses to make sure we put in enough hours at school. I think that's splendid, and I do wish you could induce Aunt Sylvia to let me go to a regular every-day school," pouted Cleo. "This private tutoring is too silly for anything."

"But, Cleo dear, we cannot always stay in one place, and think, how your school work would be interrupted if you didn't have a private tutor," argued the maid, gently but not very sincerely.

"All the same," and the little rebel pushed her untouched "junket" aside, "I don't believe in tutors and private lessons. They're as flat as living this way, in apartments. Shammy told me yesterday that a truant officer can make anybody go to a regular school——"

"Shammy doesn't know what he is talking about," the busy lady interrupted. She was trying to induce Cleo to eat more, especially of the milk-made dainties. She was also trying to keep a very homely striped cat from scenting these dishes and distracting the girl who should be eating them. The striped cat was Cleo's latest whim, and as a cat it was a particularly novel whim, indeed. Baths and groomings with soaps and complexion brushes had failed utterly to develop in this vagrant feline the hidden beauty promised. But the creature had fur and an appetite; also, it could purr like a dying motor, and more important than any of these faculties "Scat" had picked Cleo's suite at dancing class, for its home quarters, and all the "Scats" pegged at it verbally, slippers and other things handy, could not intimidate the creature, nor cause it to relent in its determination to have the little lady for its mistress.

So Cleo brought it home, and Zita was now suffering the consequence.

"Why doesn't Shammy know all about the truant officers?" demanded the girl bent on revolt. "Don't you see, Zita, he has 'to head them off' as he calls it. That means he refers them to an office when he knows the manager can't be found there, because Shammy is too young to work. You just ought to know him, Zita. He is the smartest boy——"

"Cleo dear, I am sure your aunt would not like you to be so familiar with a boy who just answers calls——"

"As if I care!" and the blue eyes flashed metallic glints. "Shammy is a good, true friend, and he's clever and even brilliant," declared the girl. "Of course, I know he says things a little rough, but that's just for effect. We say things too nice, and that's just for effect too. He's as honest as we are, and lots more genuine." Cleo was thus showing how grown up she could argue. Scat was purring like a tea kettle now, for Cleo had him in her arms and was tracing his stripes and counting their "feathers" with affectionate fingers.

"He must be a remarkable boy," assented Zita, troubled at Cleo's perversity, but too wise

to betray her fears. Surely this "red-headed messenger boy," was too radical a companion for her young charge. But to interfere openly with the child's friendship would, she knew, invite more positive discontent. None knew better than Zita the source of Cleo's rebellious tendencies. Cleo's mother had been Zita's girlhood friend, and it was her hatred for small-town prejudice that had brought her to the city. Now the little daughter resented the narrowness of the selfsame city, and even the same social demands, like the bud on a rose bush, that will climb to the top-most branch just to wave back at the big rose on the stronger, statelier stem beneath. That was how Cleo's whim reflected her ancestry.

A few hours later the hated "private lesson" was over and the equally hated private tutor had left; after disapproving of "Scat" who was nothing but the common gutter cat, she declared, and after expressing her dislike for Chinese incense that "takes the place of good pure oxygen in one's lungs, and it is dreadful for some delicate throats." Cleo had managed to keep the stuff burning with unusual zest during lessons, and the choking spells of Miss Warren marked time splendidly for forgotten lines. Also they served

to put the lesson time over and vary the stupid subjects.

"We must be more attentive at our books now, Cleo," coaxed the long-suffering Zita, when the teacher had left. "Suppose we try to review all the work of the whole month and perhaps we could then declare a holiday."

"I'm going to have a holiday anyhow. I hope Aunt Sylvia goes to Palm Beach or some other nice place and just leaves us alone for a long time. I intend to see this big city soon, Zita. Don't you want to come along?"

It was at this auspicious moment that Nellie Glennon, her mother and the fresh laundry arrived.

"Oh, goody! It's Nellie!" exclaimed Cleo. "Now I am going to have a lovely time. Come on in, Nellie. I don't have to go to any single place today nor tonight, and we can have a lot of fun. Please, Mrs. Glennon, may Nellie stay all night?"

"Cleo dear, you sweep me off my feet," replied Mrs. Glennon, beaming with pleasure. "Nellie has been pestering me to let her come, and now you want her to stay all night. Seems to me," with a sly but pronounced wink at Zita, "these two little ones are up to something. I

would wager on that. Now, what's it all about, I'd like to know?"

But neither the two girls nor the two women waited for an answer to the question; instead they paired off, Cleo enfolding Nellie with something like the tenderness she evinced toward the forlorn Scat; Zita piloting Mrs. Glennon to the little kitchenette with a welcome equally sincere.

"Nellie, Nell, Nellinsky!" cried Cleo, dancing to the words. "Oh, I've been just dying to see you! I've got such a lot to talk about!"

"And I've been just as crazy to see you!" confessed Nellie. "They can't hear us, can they?" with her eyes indicating "they" in the kitchen.

"Come on up on the roof, it isn't cold. We have a little private end and we can talk ourselves to death," suggested Cleo, fairly stifled at the prospect. "Keep your coat on and I'll get a cape. Zita!" she called, "we're going up to the roof for a little while. I need air after that hateful lesson." She twisted her pretty face to contradict the claim and Nellie laughed with her as they fluttered out to the elevator.

Along the broad corridors with the softest of noiseless carpets, these two girls, so different in appearance yet so alike in loves and longings, passed without glancing at the guests who, some-

how, never lost their personal interest in Cleo, the girl they supposed was living alone with a "maid" and therefore entitled to pity. The big elevator ascended to the roof and at the last stop the two young passengers quickly turned their backs on the car and its uniformed attendant to find the private corner where they could, if they chose, "talk themselves to death."

"Do let me look at you," demanded Cleo, holding the visitor off at arm's length. "Nellie, you are the only real live girl I ever have a chance to talk to. You know, those around this city are always going some place in such a hurry, so we bang into each other and apologize, then chew up the apology in the next bang we get. Sometimes I wonder if we would know each other if we met in the regular public places, a depot, for instance." Her eyes were devouring the placid Nellie, and there was no doubt the brown-eyed girl furnished a choice bit of seeing. Rich golden-brown ringlets of hair just touched her shoulders in a little shower of curls at the ends, her cheeks were rosy as a country girl's, her simple plaid skirt, blue sweater and rakish black velvet "tam" seemed the best sort of costume for her frank type, and altogether Nellie Glennon was well worth looking at. The lights had

just been switched on and threw uncertain gleams over the pergola, where Cleo and Nellie stood directly under a big, green shaded arc, and both seemed an important part of the attractive setting.

"You talk about real girls and real things," argued Nellie, resenting the close scrutiny of Cleo's well-trained eye. "Why, you don't know what you're talking about. You just ought to have my place for a while. Then you'd see."

"I wish I could, I just wish I could. Nellie, come over and sit on the bench and let's talk ourselves to death. I'll die if I don't, so I may as well die if I do." Cleo took the arm in the blue sweater and propelled Nellie to the wicker bench.

"Isn't it lovely up here!" exclaimed Nellie ecstatically.

"Yes, but you see it's all imitation. This is a private roof garden. But why can't we have the roof garden where it belongs?" complained Cleo. "We used to have one, and it was wonderful."

"Yes, and why can't *we* have a garden? You should see *my* roof garden on the fire escape." Nellie's laugh was free from bitterness but charged with the humor of such comparisons.

"But it's yours. You can plant geraniums in

tin cans if you want to, and I know, I honestly do know, everything blooms better in tin cans. Shammy says so. He plants slips out of my bouquets," Cleo confided, "and he says they grow beautifully."

"It isn't mine and we don't dare put even a tomato can on the fire escape—against the rules," contradicted Nellie. "But I do hang them from the outside in summer time, and yes, I'll say they do bloom well. But who is Shammy? Isn't he Sammy?"

Cushions were now adjusted for real confidence. Cleo never tired of describing Shammy, and on Nellie's sympathetic ears the account fell with gentle fascination.

"He must be nicer than Timmie," she commented, "although Timmie is the nicest boy I know."

"Is he going to grow big and handsome with *wild* red hair and *bold*, blazing eyes?" Cleo asked. "Shammy is like that, at least he will be when he grows up, and perhaps later he'll get fat and jolly like his mother."

This possibility provoked such joy that the two girls rocked and roared at the thought of it.

"But Timmie is small, and sharp and foxy," Nellie presently explained, in due loyalty to the

boy of her especial choice. "He isn't so much to look at, even mother says that, but my! how he can fight! All the bigger boys are afraid of him, and he often fights for me when 'smarties' peg things at my baskets. That's why we had to buy suitcases; so the clothes couldn't get soiled."

"You bought them? Why didn't you tell me? I could have spared a couple. But why do the boys bother you when you go delivering?"

"Why? Oh, just because. They think it's smart," explained Nellie. "Just teasing, you know."

"Like little brothers in stories, I suppose," concluded Cleo. "I often wondered if they were really like that. I am sure I should love your Timmie. It's perfectly noble of him to fight for you."

"And he's so good natured," added the champion. "He does lots of errands for mother, and brings us bargains from the fruit and vegetable stands. Everybody in the neighborhood likes Timmie, even the fellows he can lick."

"I should think they would. I'm just crazy about Shammy. Not foolish you know," Cleo hurried to qualify, "but just because he's so wonderfully real. And his freckles! Why, Nellie, I'm sure he could get into the movies on them,

but I do hope he doesn't find it out," sighed the girl who loved things real.

"Oh, tell me about your charity play." Nellie's voice dropped to entreaty, and her arm stole under Cleo's soft cape to coax for the "telling."

"Certainly. You're my company and I am glad to entertain you," replied Cleo. "What shall I tell you about?"

"Everything. I just love the plays and—singing."

"Do you honestly? And I hate that stuff, or I think I do. But maybe I don't really. You see, Nellie, I'm growing up and I hate all the fussing Aunt Sylvia is always giving. I like Zita better than her. I wish *she* were my aunt." The rose-bud lips tightened on the thought.

"Mother says your mother and Zita were just like sisters. That makes her *almost* your aunt," consoled Nellie.

"Yes, but you see she can't do as she pleases. Nellie, I have a secret about Zita, and Shammy is helping me with it. He's just as good as a first-class detective, and oh—it's a perfectly lovely secret." The arc light spattered and sputtered and tried to warn the little girl with the trusting blue eyes, but Cleo went right on.

"I'd love to tell you about it, only I've prom-

ised Shammy. Perhaps when I tell him you're my very best friend, and never would give a secret away, then he'll agree," she suggested.

"Oh, I don't mind; just tell about your play." Another confidential cuddle from Nellie.

"I've got something better than just stupid old plays to tell you about. Next to Shammy it's the best thing I know. It's about a new girl named Presto."

"Presto! That's something to eat!"

"No, it means fast, quick as lightning, and this new girl is just like that. And she's so pretty and shy. But wonderful at turns. You see, she's my partner. Aunt Sylvia got her, special, and she does all the dangerous things I ought to do," mocked Cleo. "It just makes me sick."

"I know your Aunt Sylvia is afraid you'll get hurt. But—Cleo, I wish I could be your partner, and all that. You know I'm awfully strong."

"Yes, of course you are, and I'm sure you could do a lot, but you see——" Cleo hesitated. How could she make Nellie understand about society? "But I want to tell you about this new girl," she suddenly began again. "She lives with foreigners. I don't know just what they are but they look like Swedes, big blonde folks and she's dark like a French girl. I just wouldn't wonder if they

found her with a circus, because they are all acrobatic." Cleo was determined to have a mystery surround Presto.

"Maybe," said Nellie. She would have preferred to hear about real wonders of the big play that was to be given in a real theatre, but was politely attentive, nevertheless.

"And no one, not even Shammy can make friends with her," went on Cleo. "Some of the other girls think she's stiff and haughty, but I don't. I know she's just natural and real. You see, Nellie, our play is a real story and has real acting in it, and she drops off the roof or she dives into the tank as naturally as if she were just having a good time. She wears a wig to look like me and has costumes like mine," the girl continued to explain, "and I'd just love to know a lot about her."

"Are her folks cross? Can't you talk to her?" Nellie suggested.

"Oh, I do, of course, but she simply comes in when I do and does all her acts and when we're finished she goes. We never get a chance to see her, after rehearsals."

"Maybe she plays somewhere else," suggested practical Nellie.

"That's so, I never thought of that. Those

acrobats do go on circuits," reflected Cleo. "But see, it's getting dark. The lights in the big buildings are coming out like fireflies. Don't you love to see them when they twinkle up first? And think of all that's going on in those lots and lots of rooms where those little lights—sort of blossom up fresh every night. I bring Zita up here whenever I get a chance and she tells me the loveliest stories. Zita, you know, Nellie, is really poetical." Cleo whispered that; as if fearing the words might lose their value were they spoken aloud. A whisper seemed so much more important.

"Yes?" Nellie said that in question form, her voice tinkling as she did so.

"I'm sure she could write books if Aunt Sylvia would give her time," went on Cleo. "But the aunt thinks mending and sewing on stupid buttons is a more important line of work. But I'd just like to see her do some of it," grumbled the rebel.

"It's a wonder mother hasn't come up after me," said Nellie, abstractedly. "They must be having a great talk themselves."

"Indeed, yes," agreed Cleo. "Zita often says she would rather talk to your mother than go to a play. Not that she ever wants to go to a the-

atre, Nellie; that's part of my secret," and Cleo's voice grew tragic, quite theatrical in fact.

"You do love Zita, don't you?"

"Love her! Nellie, she's more than any one else in the world to me. I never can feel Aunt Sylvia is a real aunt; she's so cold and impersonal. But I'm growing up now, you know." The form under the soft cape expanded until Nellie felt how grown up her companion actually was, "and I can see what sacrifices Zita is making for me. Then——" the voice again glided into a whisper, "she does act so mysterious sometimes. You don't mind if I keep my secret for a little while, do you, Nellie? I promise to tell you the very first one."

"'Course I don't mind. But Cleo! I thought I heard some one—in the corner. Listen!"

CHAPTER V

THE LADY-CLOUD

It was so slight a movement, and made so slight an impression on the quietude of the early evening, that the girls would not have noticed it but for a gentle little wind that seemed to come with the muffled sound.

Cleo drew her breath in quickly and herself with it, but Nellie threw her head up and sniffled. Scenting danger, the latter became aggressive while her companion grew frightened.

"Let's go down," Cleo whispered. "I didn't know we were all alone up here. I guess every one is dressing for dinner."

"We're not alone," whispered Nellie in return. "See, there goes the wind. It's back of that lattice now. See!"

Phantomlike, something misty and fluttery was just swishing around the improvised garden screen. It looked like a soft, gray cloud, and was almost as noiseless.

"It's a woman!" breathed Cleo. "Come on down, Nellie. We don't know what sort of people may be in this big place." She drew Nellie along as she started for the few steps that would lead them to the elevator.

"Are you afraid?" asked Nellie, not unkindly. "I'd just love to see who it is. She seems to walk on air—and look! Can that be her hair flying out like a little cloud? It must be wonderful hair, if it is."

"Do you believe in *haunts*?" Cleo did not ask this question until the friendly lights of the big passageway reassured her.

"Haunts! Ghosts, you mean? On a roof garden! No," scoffed the visitor. "I don't believe in them at all, but I am sure they would never venture out on a big city roof like this. Why, they'd blow away." Nellie seemed reluctant to leave without satisfying her interest in the spectral intruder, but Cleo was plainly glad to find the elevator coming up. She held on to Nellie's arm and laughed nervously when Jackson, the operator, pretended he was going down again without seeing the two little passengers waiting.

"Down! Down!" called Cleo nervously, and

then the gate shot open and Jackson smiled broadly as he answered.

"Watch your step, please." There was no one else in the car and he added pleasantly, "Wasn't you afraid up there in the dark? Did yu' see any spooks, or fairies?"

Before the children could attempt to answer, the next floor was reached and other passengers stepped in beside them. Nellie was fascinated with the display of bright dinner gowns, and she edged back in the corner, conscious of her own contrasting simplicity. Cleo replied to the friendly greetings exchanged, and in another moment, they were at the fifth floor where her own apartment was situated.

"Remember, you are surely to stay all night," she cautioned Nellie. "Don't let anything spoil our plans."

Her companion looked doubtfully into the entreating blue eyes. Nellie Glennon did not always get just what she wanted, and unlike the other girl she was already disciplined to regard the wishes of others. Perhaps her mother would not find it convenient to let her stay over night, she was reasoning wisely.

Mrs. Glennon met them at the door.

"Well, what have you two been up to? Here

I was, tied hand and foot, you might say, and worried stiff about you young ones——”

“Where’s Zita?” exclaimed Cleo.

“Called out to a sick friend——”

“Called out from *me*?”

“When folks get sick, little girl, they don’t stop to ask who they are botherin’. Here I am and likely Miss Davis poundin’ down my door for her fine slips.” There was subtle meaning in the statement. It was Mrs. Glennon who had cause for complaint.

“But who would call Zita away? That’s what I’m surprised at,” Cleo demanded to know.

“It was very urgent, and she’ll be right back, at least I hope so.” The excited woman had buttoned and unbuttoned her coat three times as she talked.

“Mrs. Glennon!” exclaimed Cleo, with a sudden move at once confronting and beseeching. “Nellie can stay with me tonight, can’t she?”

“Stay with you? Why?”

“Just for company.” Blue eyes begged and the yellow head tipped from side to side cunningly. “I want her to stay so much, and when Aunt Sylvia is away we can always have—a better time,” Cleo urged, eagerly.

“Here’s Zita now.” The elevator stopped at

their door, where all three were waiting. "I'm glad she's back——" Mrs. Glennon was searching the white face of the companion anxiously. Zita was almost breathless as she reached them.

"All right?" asked Mrs. Glennon significantly.

"Yes, come along, Cleo. It's time for your tonic."

"Oh, tonic, Zita Brady, where have you been? Tell us all about the excitement." Cleo was primed now for a thrilling tale, and dragged Zita away from the kitchenette toward the living room. "Who is sick? And how did they find you here?"

"Well, I've got to be goin'," interrupted Mrs. Glennon pointedly. "And, Nellie, you had better be comin' along."

"Can't Nellie stay? Please, Mrs. Glennon. Zita, ask her. I want Nellie so much tonight," and for the moment Cleo forgot all other excitement in that of trying to get the jolly little Nellie with her for the night. The two women were talking in knowing glances. What ever had occasioned Zita's mysterious call from the apartment it was not intended the children should share knowledge of it. Mrs. Glennon was obviously nervous in her attempts at distracting them, and Zita's heavy, restless eyes shifted from one situa-

tion to another anxiously. Nellie, more keenly suspicious than the humored child, was not losing all of the exchanges between her mother and Zita; but even suspicion may find good reasons for queer happenings, and her active mind was busy framing excuses of this strange state of affairs.

"May she stay?" Zita asked finally.

"Well——"

"She may! She may!" exclaimed Cleo, before the mother closed her lips. "Come along, Nellie. We haven't half talked ourselves to death yet, and what a night we are going to have!"

Like a little cyclone she swept from Zita to Nellie and on with a wonderful "swoop" to the genial Mrs. Glennon, somehow gathering the party into the living room and there making known the plans for the great night in prospect.

"Don't get so excited," cautioned Zita, who still betrayed something very like excitement herself.

"Swept me clean off my feet," laughed Mrs. Glennon, who made a very decided move toward the door. "If I let Nellie stay you're not to fill your young heads with nonsense," she ordered. "I don't know why it is, but children all seem to want what they can't get and not to want what

they've got to have." She was shaking her head meditatively and did not depend entirely upon words for her conversation.

"We'll be good! We'll be good!" Cleo was dancing again. "And oh! you should have seen the ghost on the roof!" she suddenly digressed.

"Ghost! On the roof!" Zita's eyes shot a wild glance at Mrs. Glennon.

"Yes, something swishy like a Lady-Cloud with floating hair and gossamer gowns——"

"Whatever are you talking about?" demanded Mrs. Glennon, in mock severity.

"About a haunt——" Cleo struck a descriptive, tragic pose.

"Oh, some one drying her hair, I guess," suggested Nellie, coolly.

"Of course, certainly, what else? A ghost!" Mrs. Glennon hurried to exclaim as she shot a look of relief at Zita. "You children can imagine the wildest things——"

"But we don't care a bit about it, anyhow," chirped Cleo, to whom the visit of Nellie promised delight unlimited. "But when folks wash their hair around dinner time——"

"Bad appetite, maybe," suggested Mrs. Glennon, with a laugh scarcely genuine. "Anyhow, I'm goin' now, for sure. Miss Davis will be get-

ting the janitor to fish her slips out of the window—they're in plain sight on the line over the stove. Good-bye, daughter," she kissed the upturned face, "and take care Cleo doesn't turn you into a—society queen."

But Nellie didn't promise she would even try to avert such a thrilling possibility; rather she smiled hopefully into her mother's generous brown eyes. She seemed to love the very things Cleo hated.

"But you said I didn't take my singing craze from the wind, Momsey," Nellie spoke up quizzically. "Didn't you help at dressing big singers? And wasn't daddy—really a pretty good singer himself?"

"And wasn't your grandmother a fine house-keeper, and don't you hate to wash dishes? Take it from the wind!" Mrs. Glennon showed her own training in the way she said that. "I think I'll drop a line to the weather man and see if he can't deliver us a bit of wind with some common sense in it. He might do a good turn for the Board of Education with a little trick like that. Good-bye now, and see that you both mind Zita." Then the portly Mrs. Glennon, who did fancy laundry work for society and professional people, was gone.

An hour later supper was over, and the girls were still exhaling and inhaling excitement with every breath.

"Just sing that new song for me, Cleo," begged Nellie, who was lingering lovingly over the sheet music that made quite a picture gallery about the piano with the attractive, highly colored covers. "I love this," a subdued hum gave the clue.

"Oh, I sing that in the play," replied Cleo. "It is sort of pretty. I'll try it if you like." It was pretty, and Cleo sang it with telling effect. Also she showed some skill with the accompaniment.

"Dear little earth-babies, tell me your dream,
Bluebells and buttercups close by the stream:
Do you want to grow big and run off through
the green?
Dear little flowerlets, tell me your dream."

So went the refrain, and Nellie scarcely breathed as the youthful voice, with its studied method, filled the rooms. Cleo turned a laughing face into the devouring eyes.

"Nellie, you are easily affected," she said gently. "Your eyes are all teary."

"I know," confessed the girl on the edge of the piano bench. "But I love songs about flowers

and—wild places. Just see that picture! The little baby faces in the flowerlets!"

"And you should see the real little babies in the flower chorus," Cleo told her. "They just bob up and down and nod on their stems. You see, they are to be dressed in soft green leafy things, and will look really like live flowers. Nellie, do you ever go to see any real good special children's plays?"

"I did once last year when Zita gave us tickets. But you were not in that play," Nellie recalled.

"Well, I'll tell you, Nelly-Delly, you must come to see the play I'm going to be in this time. You'll love it——"

"Will I? Love it?" Nellie's arms were tight around the other girl on the slippery stool. "Cleo, I wouldn't mind how hard I'd have to work at school, and afterwards at home with mother, if only I could go to a real play once in a while, and hear girls sing; I'm just crazy about singing," she sort of squealed, "and you know I like to imitate!" This confession brought a shy little flush to Nellie's responsive cheeks.

"Do you? Can you imitate? Have you ever tried to act?" Cleo thought more of acting than she did of singing.

"Oh, yes," more flushes. "And they say I

do pretty well." Accents trailing humbly along.

"They say? Who says? Where have you tried?"

"I take the most important girl parts at our school plays. But that's because I sing, you know." The pride of authorized influence rang through this announcement, "and our teacher says I have a real, true voice."

"Oh, how perfectly splendid!" exclaimed Cleo. "To think we are really both young singers. That makes us better chums than ever. Come on over now on the big divan and let's talk it all out," suggested the insatiable Cleo. "I don't believe I would learn to sing if I knew all about other girls, real girls doing the same thing in homemade plays."

"They're not homemade," declared Nellie, with slight resentment. "They're just wonderful. You should come around and see our new play. We've been practicing for it ever so long. But of course, you wouldn't come to a common school play." There was no hint of sarcasm in this.

"Of course I would," sang out Cleo. "Why wouldn't I? And the next day I'm free and you have something going on, you just let me know in time to come." Cleo was making a cushion nest for Nellie. "I wonder if it's really true that

every girl in the world at some time wants to take parts in plays. That's what our teacher tells us," commented Cleo, thoughtfully.

"I'll bet it's true that all the girls over our way want to act all the time," expanded Nellie. "Some of them are so crazy when we have a play on they can't think of anything else!" She bit her lip to suppress self-consciousness.

"I know. That's because everybody imagines she would like to be somebody else, and would do wonderful things if she only got the other one's chance." Cleo was still moralizing, but she didn't realize it. "Some say that's ambition," she went on, "and some say it's just plain vanity, but you see, Nellie," a hug emphasized the point, "I am made to study all this stuff and I imagine if I were somebody else I could do wonderful things and have wonderful times. It's the same thing, isn't it?"

"I guess so," agreed Nellie vaguely. But the tune of the "Flower Babies" would hum itself through her head, and only with an effort could she answer intelligently Cleo's storm of personal questions.

"But you've got a real home, all the same," concluded the pampered girl, "and I shouldn't mind a bit if I had to help such a jolly

mother as you have. She isn't a bit like a widow."

"A widow!" Nellie repeated incredulously. "Nobody calls my mother a widow. Of course, daddy's dead and all that, but mother couldn't be—like—a real widow."

"I don't believe she could," agreed the infatuated Cleo. "My Aunt Sylvia is more like one—the new kind that they write fancy operas about." Cleo qualified, with a saucy little chuckle.

"Maybe she is one," suggested Nellie brightly.

"Maybe," replied Cleo radiantly.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN NELLIE STAYED ALL NIGHT

"WHAT a perfectly darling room!" exclaimed Nellie, standing under a little trellis that arched the living room from Cleo's bed-room.

"Oh, do you like it? I get so tired of everything, I guess I can't see that it is really pretty," sighed Cleo. "The bluebirds were so attractive at first, but now they seem like a lot of dead things just crowding my eyes. Did you ever feel that way, Nellie?"

"Yes, once when I had scarlet fever and I couldn't stop looking at the pans over the kitchen sink. I couldn't see anything else through the bed-room door until mother made a bed on the kitchen lounge, under our best and brightest window. Then I could see the sky between the houses."

"Couldn't see the sky here from any window," Cleo complained. "And I would rather see one live bird, fluttering around in the park, than all

those painted dead beauties," she declared, with a wave at the billowy cretonnes in which the pretty chamber was lavishly hung. "And you see, I am like the bird in the cage, sitting on a foolish little stick, and preening all the day long; while you are like the happy, free bird in the park, that can go as it pleases." The hostess was laying out the night things and the visitor was looking on rather awe-stricken.

"But I am not free at all," contradicted the latter, finally. "And you can't call this beautiful place—a foolish cage."

"But don't you see how unreal everything is? So show-off and artificial, I mean," Cleo argued. "Even the windows don't open outdoors, all walled in, and the very sky is screened off at top with our roof garden bridge. They call it a court, you know. See, this window goes into it." She pushed up the heavy sash with an effort and allowed a dank, damp breeze to filter in.

"Oh, yes; our air is fresher than that," admitted Nellie. "But this is a lovely, big broad window, just the same."

"Come and get undressed," begged Cleo. "I'm just as excited as if I were going away some place. You can't imagine how lovely it is to have company all night." She really was a lonely little

girl—lonely for that companionship she continually craved.

“And it’s lovelier for me,” replied Nellie appreciatively. “Is this your aunt’s bed?”

“Yes, that’s hers,” indicating one of the white ivoried twin beds with the lace coverlets. “But Aunt Sylvia is a fickle twin. She’s not home much, and now, I think, she’s off for Palm Beach. She has nerves or something.” Cleo tossed back the bed decorations and placed a soft nightdress on the “fickle twin” for Nellie.

Rather shyly the little visitor divested herself of her plain garments. But she had no cause for embarrassment, for each was fresh and wholesome and not a button was missing from the entire outfit. Mrs. Glennon was bringing her daughter up practically, and in her efforts she was being greatly assisted in the practical instruction given at Nellie’s school, where they taught sewing with domestic science.

Presently each girl was in her nightdress, and each danced around in the natural freedom that children are so keen to sense when restraining clothes are shed for slumber things.

“You look too sweet for anything,” declared Cleo, gazing with unstinted admiration at the shy little Nellie. And she did. Her brown curls,

freed from the barette, fell in such a true line around her bare neck, just like the little old-fashioned prints of "Evening Prayer" one might find in a grandmother's attic; her big brown eyes were rich as velvet with pansy glints, and her bare arms were smooth and rounded. Nellie did look "too sweet for anything," as Cleo was declaring.

"You look,—very pretty too," Nellie returned the complimentary gaze not unsatisfied with the other beaming girl who fluttered about, making little things ready for a comfortable night. Cleo's short yellow hair was in modern contrast to the prim curls on Nellie's head, and she bobbed it up and down in restless activity, quite like the buttercup in her own pretty song. But there was one thing more than all the other articles in the over-furnished room that held Nellie's attention. That was the little cupid lamp that stood on a tiny white table between the two beds. To think of having light "on and off" with scarcely a move from one's pillow!

The yellow head and the brown head were presently looking under the mellow light shed by the cupid bearer, and after a series of giggles and titters that trailed into a veritable sound circle, the two girls took a fresh hold on the absorbing situation.

"What shall we talk about?" Cleo asked with polite consideration for her guest.

"About the charity play—you promised to tell me——"

"I'll tell you about Shammy——"

"Oh, you did tell me all about him," interrupted Nellie, to whom Shammies, with red hair and movie freckles, were no novelty. "Tell me about your play—about your part and everything."

"I don't believe I can," demurred Cleo. "But I'll try. Well, I'm going to be in a queer little English piece and I'm lost in the woodlands like a pilgrim. Then a young prince comes to my rescue——"

"Oh, how wonderful!" Nellie breathed ecstatically. "What sort of a prince is he?"

"A nice chap with curly hair and a curly voice. He's a wild prince when he comes off. Always ready to play tricks and get into trouble, while we're waiting for our turns."

"Tell me about—what you do," pressed Nellie impatiently.

"I don't do as much really as I'm supposed to," confessed Cleo. "You see, Presto, the other girl, dives from a rock and drops off a roof. I

could do it just as well as not, if Aunt Sylvia wasn't so fussy," grumbled Cleo.

"I wish I could see you——"

Zita, who had been busy while the children prepared for bed, now put in an appearance. "It's time for lights out," she announced pleasantly, with a loving glance at the two girls who seemed so well placed in each other's company. "A busy day tomorrow, you know, Cleo." She touched the button that switched off all the lights in the bed-room and only the glow from the living room was left.

"We'll just whisper a little, Zita," promised Cleo, "and then the first thing you know we'll be asleep. But listen a minute, pl-e-ease! I want Nellie to come visit me at dancing school very soon. Can't you come with her?"

"Why," faltered the woman who was raising a window, "couldn't Nellie go with her mother? She knows people in that building, dear."

"But I want you to come and you are always disappointing me," grumbled Cleo. "Of course, Mrs. Glennon may come if she wants to, but I know four would look like a crowd, and Nellie wants to see all the mysteries! How we dress and everything."



"IT'S TIME FOR LIGHTS OUT," SHE ANNOUNCED PLEASANTLY
Cleo's Misty Rainbow.

Page 66

"Well, we'll see," evaded Zita, moving about busily.

"Now promise!" Cleo was sitting up and had turned on the bed light. "Just you promise, honest and truly, Zita-Wita. Make her, Nellie."

"I can't tell, dear. Something may require me here——" argued Zita.

"With Aunt Sylvia away and me away most of the time? Now, you are just trying to get out of it, and you have been almost promising for so long——" A wistful appeal was clear in the voice, and a little lacy cap tossed fretfully on the much-abused pillow, as Cleo grumbled openly.

Just then Nellie caught an anxious look in the eyes of the busy Zita, and wondered, vaguely, if the sick friend of the afternoon was still worrying her. She ventured to ask.

"I think she will be all right," replied the young woman rather abruptly. "How much shall I open the window for you little owls?" she hurried to interrupt.

"Not too much," warned Cleo. "You know, Zita, we saw a Lady-Cloud on the roof and she might blow in."

"Please do not talk such nonsense, dear," Zita said nervously. "You will be prompting Nellie to bad dreams."

"But we saw her distinctly," insisted Cleo, now ready to pursue that line of argument. "Wasn't she exactly like a cloud, Nellie?"

The screen Zita was adjusting slipped from her hands and slid against the window with a crash. Both girls jumped and squealed a little; then giggled foolishly at the result of the weird suggestion.

"Don't let her blow our screen down," joked Cleo. "I told you she was a Lady-Cloud, Zita." But this time the companion did not reply: instead she arranged the screen in place, adjusted the window at its usual six inches open top and bottom, and turned out the lights finally.

"Kiss me! Kiss me!" chirped Cleo. "And I love you just the same, Zita-Wita, if you do fool me on coming to the school with me. There," a generous hug was "there" and a resounding kiss followed. "Give Nellie one too, lady-love, and don't you wish I had a sister just like brown-eyed Nellie?"

"It would be lovely," sighed the woman, and Nellie received her company kiss from Zita, glad the room was too dark to betray her twitching dimples. "Go to sleep now, and don't forget your prayers," concluded the watchful caretaker, patiently.

After that the children talked in whispers and giggles. The joy of such close companionship was overwhelming to temperamental Cleo. She wanted to imagine that she and Nellie were sailing away from the big city, and she attempted to describe the berths on a liner, and how the waves tossed, but the result was rather unexpected, for Nellie rolled over to meet Cleo's rolling and Cleo very nearly landed on the floor.

Squeals and unconquered peals of laughter followed, until Zita called a warning. At last even those untiring spirits were conquered by the full day's tally, and when Zita again ventured a close personal survey, she was convinced her two charges were really sound asleep.

She waited to make "sure" more certain still, then she slipped into her dark blue cloak and very quietly opened the door into the corridor. The latch key sprang to its lock as she released it, and leaving the two unsuspecting children alone, she reluctantly turned away from the apartment.

But she did not go down in the elevator.

Cautious, as if fearful of being seen, she hurried through the hall and down the broad marble steps that wound around the lift shaft. Then she glided out a side door into the street, and was

soon lost in the crowd of self-centered pedestrians.

A half hour later she returned as she had left; impatiently let herself in and hurried to the bedside of the sleeping children. Finding everything as she had left it, Zita sighed gratefully, allowed herself to smile at the hands that had fallen from their span across the twin beds' space, and then she noiselessly opened the door that led to her own connecting room.

"A Lady-Cloud!" she was thinking. "What an idea! I am glad the child has the good company of Nellie Glennon to save her from more vivid fears. Darling little Cleo!"

And the big city droned its midnight murmuring.

CHAPTER VII

TOMMY'S FLOWER SHOWER

NELLIE's visit proved to be all and more than was expected of it, and for days things were reckoned by Cleo as either being "before Nellie came" or "since Nellie was here."

"She is a dear little girl," agreed Zita, "and her visit really did you a lot of good, Cleo."

"I know it, and I am going to visit her sometime," Cleo declared impulsively.

"They live in rather crowded quarters," Zita explained kindly. "But wherever Mrs. Glennon is, she makes a home of it. I never knew a more practical woman. At the same time she is so kind and gentle——"

"And human and not a bit widowy," interrupted Cleo. "Of course, every one is human, some kind of human, I suppose, but Nellie's mother is the best kind. And I am going to visit their home that in summer time has real flowers

hanging over the far edges of the fire escapes—not in the way of escaping, for Nellie said they must always keep the fire steps clear. The flowers couldn't be there now, in cold weather," Cleo qualified, "but fresh, clean country winds can always blow in from the sky, and their sky isn't bridged over as it is in our own musty shaft," she complained, in a way rather old for her years.

"You are quite right, dear. There are compensations in everything and it is well there are, for otherwise the world would be more unkind to the poor," sighed Zita. "Shall we go for a walk? You'll have lots of time before your French lesson."

"Oh, yes, let's walk down to the ferry and watch along the river," exclaimed Cleo. "There's so much to see there. All the big strong horses and the big brave men, and the lively boys helping with everything. I always think the ferry is in another country; it is so different from other parts of the city."

"We couldn't walk that far but we can take a car and get off at a little distance from the ferry," agreed Zita. "Then too, we will have the advantage of the fresh air from the water. Bundle up well and put on your walking shoes. I'll be ready in a very few minutes. I have to write

some messages for the delivery boys," she finished.

"When did Aunt Sylvia say she would be back, Zita?" Cleo asked, her hand at her hat and her eyes watching Zita's reflection in the oval mirror in front of her.

"She is not certain. Her doctor says the damp city air aggravates her neuritis, so she may go South early—earlier than you and I can go. She says in today's letter she is waiting for a reply from your other guardian. Of course, we will leave the city as early as we can."

"I'd like to go, Zita, as long as you go with me." Still watching the reflection that came over her shoulder Cleo saw Zita stop suddenly and look up as if ready to say something boldly. Her head went up, her eyes became fixed and her whole attitude bespoke determination. Then she caught Cleo watching her in the mirror and shook her head quizzically.

"I'm afraid I shan't always be able to be with you," she finally answered. "I have some personal obligations in the city. I have to be here most of the time," she added very quietly.

"And you never trust me, Zita," Cleo's voice pleaded for confidence. "Why can't you tell me what is troubling you? Who was taken sick the

day Nellie was here?" she asked bluntly. "Is it that?"

"Perhaps, yes—it was a very dear friend, Cleo. But please don't ask any more just yet. I'd love to tell you, but you must have guessed I am not perfectly free." The dark-eyed woman looked down into Cleo's eager face. What a real little woman a keenly sensitive girl can be at times! she was thinking.

"But I'd love to help you," pleaded Cleo. "Couldn't we go today to see your friend?"

"I'm afraid not. There," she pressed her lips to Cleo's cheek. "Let us take our walk and not worry about horrid sickness."

"But *you* are worried about it?"

Zita smiled and attempted to bounce the girl from her place on the dressing stool.

"Child alive!" she exclaimed. "What would your auntie say if she could hear our sordid gloomy confabs? Let's run along out into the sunshine and hunt for rosy cheeks. You wouldn't have poor old Zita fail in her duty, would you?" She had lifted the girl and gave her the baby bounce she still loved to get.

"Duty fiddlesticks!" replied Cleo disdainfully. "I've got some duty of my own and it points to *you*. And maybe, I'm just dying to know your

secret. Maybe—that's mostly it." The girl had assumed a characteristic pose—one decidedly Cleoesque.

"Really, dear, it is not such a great secret," confided Zita, standing now ready to spring the latch on the door. "But your Aunt Sylvia is very nervous and seems to worry a lot about you." She paused, then presently continued. "I think it is best not to bother your little head about it at all. Let's forget all about—secrets."

"Oh, very well, if I must be just a doll, a foolish manikin parading around to make people clap their hands and blow their noses!" Cleo was quite indignant and her eyes did not deny the fact. "I did think, Zita, you at least—understood me!" She was now openly rebelling against the absurd régime imposed upon her by her absent Aunt Sylvia.

To be made a little society queen! To take dancing lessons, singing lessons, etiquette lessons and even to be taught how to act in a play that was masquerading under the patronage of charity. No wonder Cleo rebelled. She had once shared all the natural joys of childhood, in their little country home. But how long ago that seemed now! How greedy a city is! How it swallows little girls whole, in a single, big glut-

tonous bite, if the victims are supposed to be rich and therefore considered good food for the monster city.

Cleo didn't reason all this out in just this way but she did arrive at the selfsame conclusions.

A messenger boy charitably intervened, as Zita refused to answer the girl's last charge. He brought a package, a box of flowers and a letter.

"An invitation," said Zita, after signing the boy's slip. "Wait, dear, until I put the flowers in a cool place and then we'll get to our walking, finally."

"More flowers for Shammy's fund," exclaimed Cleo, forgetting her ill humor. "I hope they're some kind that will keep well."

"Suppose we walk around the park," suggested Zita tactfully, as they finally started off. "You know, dear, it is rather rough along the river front."

"Too rough?" questioned Cleo keenly. "I wanted to see something over there."

"What?" Zita was surprised at this remark.

"The flower stand where Shammy sells the flowers," admitted Cleo. "He says it's just like a picture of a foreign country, but I don't suppose Shammy has ever seen actual pictures of foreign countries and he couldn't remember those in

his geography, I'm sure," she reflected sagely.

This influence of the boy at the dancing school seemed, to the companion, more potent than wise; nevertheless, she knew open opposition would fan the flame. Therefore it was toward the great busy thoroughfare, on the restless water's edge, that they started at last.

First a bus ride, always new and novel to Cleo, because on the buses she was sure to find some interesting folks out to see the city. This time it was a bride and groom—there was no mistaking the romance they were centered in, and there was no mistaking the girl's dove-colored dress, with hat to match, and the young man's spats, just a practical shade or two darker. He wore a hair-striped suit, and the carefully dented hat that insisted on flirting with the winds, was the color of the bride's dress. He carried a new umbrella, although the day was perfect, and only country folks ever carried umbrellas in the city even if it did rain.

Cleo studied the pair critically. They were the usual models for stage "honey-mooners," but no imitators could ever look so wrapt nor attentive. She had seen lots of brides and grooms in motion pictures but her eye was critical enough to discern how different the real were.

The subway ride following the bus ride, however, was not so attractive. It was just the hour for early afternoon trains and the lines running to the ferries bore the usual crowds of commuters. Cleo had a habit of protesting against the continuous taxi rides to and from places, but on leaving the stuffy subway she felt obliged to say to Zita that "taxis were some better than such trains, after all."

But it was along the busy ferry fronts that Cleo looked for her adventure.

"Yes," she exclaimed joyously, "there are the street carts with the flowers. Shammy sells ours to the carts and to the little built-in corner stands. Let me see," she drew Zita up at a miniature market, the sort with bananas and polished apples at front and a peanut heating system in the rear. "Yes, look Zita, that's the very old woman. See! She has a green patch over one eye."

The patch was easy to see, in fact hard to miss, and Zita nodded understandingly. Cleo was dragging her up to the bananas and apples, and the old woman with the shawl on her head rubbed her hands from habit, not from craftiness.

"She doesn't sell flowers," protested Zita.

"She buys them here and sells them uptown later," explained Cleo. "That is, she has a boy

who sells them. Come on over, I want to talk to her."

A crowd edged in from the opposite direction, and the triangular makeshift of a shed, with its improvised glass door, hid those approaching from the north, as Cleo and Zita bore down from the south. As they reached the front of the stand Cleo gasped:

"Oh, Shammy! Where did you—come from!"

And there stood the famous Shamus Malanaphy, his arms full of poorly disguised bunches of flowers!

"Hello!" answered the boy. "Where did *you* come from?"

"Walking. What flowers are those?"

Zita stepped aside and watched the two children. Without further explanation they immediately fell to inspecting the flowers that Shammy proceeded to unwrap from their second-hand coverings. The Italian woman placed a piece of oilcloth over the flattest corner of her fruit stand, and in that detached way, peculiar to those who live in street noises, she waited without uttering a word.

Cleo and Shammy, on the contrary, talked as if they had the world to themselves. The boy was delighted that Cleo had found the place, and

Cleo was delighted that Shammy had just come along in time. All together they were having a wonderful time, and when the flowers were carefully placed on the oilcloth, Cleo clapped her hands in such glee the woman with the patch on her eye actually smiled at Zita.

"Nice flowers," she murmured. "Nice lil' girl."

"How much today, Rosa?" demanded the businesslike Shammy, his eyes counting again the biggest roses, the best buds and then the least salable. "There's two big orchids in the box," he said to Cleo, "but I don't sell them to her."

At that moment the clang of an ambulance gong startled the flower venders. And the big car swung up to the curb and stopped not ten feet away from Rosa's stand.

"He goes," she said mournfully. "It's Tommy."

"Is he sick?" demanded Cleo, eagerly.

"Yes, poor lil' boy. No get well. Nice boy, nice mama."

Zita was urging Cleo to step nearer the windshield of the stand and thus avoid contact with the crowd forming.

Shammy glared at Rosa. "Is it Tommy Mel-len?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, it's heem. Poor Tommy. Very good boy," moaned Rosa.

"Do you know him, Sham?" gasped Cleo.

"Sure. His mother was at the Rolavard. She had charge of the cloakrooms, till he took sick——"

"Wait!" panted Cleo, suddenly grabbing up the oilcloth and bundling the flowers in it. "Here, Sham, quick. Put these in the ambulance," she ordered authoritatively.

Shammy's face lighted up, and without a word of question he seized the bundle of flowers and made way for the ambulance.

"Here! Here!" shouted Rosa. "You bring back. I have for customer. Bring back my oilcloth!"

"Cleo!" cried Zita. "Where did the boy get those flowers? I see cards on them——"

"We don't care. Tommy must have them," insisted the excited girl, edging away from Zita and as near Shammy as she dared to go. But Zita's arm suddenly held her firmly back and she was obliged to see Shammy mount the ambulance step, back of the crowd.

The attendant on the step looked down on the oilcloth bundle.

"His clothes don't go in here," he objected.

"They're flowers, and they've got to go in," fought Shammy. "They're from the girls at the Rolavard School. You know them, don't you?"

"Oh," exclaimed the linen-clad interne. "Then, I guess we can manage it. Quite a collection. I'll put them under here so it won't look like a funeral," he decided wisely: and the offering of impetuous Cleo was safely stored in the emergency box, until Tommy would be placed in his little white cot. And what a surprise it would be to have that gorgeous display for the boy's first lonely day in a big hospital!

The stretcher was coming now, and the people made room. Cleo was holding tight to Zita, but Shammy was elbowing room for her "to see."

And what she saw was a white little face just peeking out from under a rather rakish cap, that had been placed on Tommy's head to protect him from the sharp air. Up to his chin the blankets were wrapped, but the eye that escaped that cap just caught Cleo's, and a smile followed the glance.

"Oh, he sees me!" she exclaimed. "Here, Tommy!" and breaking away from Zita she managed to get to the side of the stretcher and to drop on the blanket right up by Tommy's chin a

wonderful American Beauty rose—the kind that “would keep.”

“Thanks!” breathed the boy brightly. “I’ll take it along with me! S’long!”

“All right, little sister,” spoke one of the guards. “We won’t let him lose it.”

Cleo smiled through misty eyes. “What a little hero!” she was thinking.

And then the stretcher was carefully shoved into place in the big white-lined car.

While this was occurring a taxi drew up near the curb, and just as Zita again put a rescuing arm on her willful little charge, a woman’s voice called her name.

“Zita!”

She turned to see a sad-faced young woman ready to step into the waiting cab.

“Constance!” cried Zita in return in shocked surprise. “Are you——”

“Yes; I’m Tommy’s mother,” came the answer. “I must hurry after him. How did you come here?”

• But the sad-faced young woman was obliged to hurry, for the ambulance had started and she must get to the hospital in time to reassure the little boy, so she could not stop to talk further to the astonished Zita.

Shammy was, as he said, fighting it out with Rosa. She was talking Italian but any one could understand her wrath, and Shammy told her he "wouldn't ever give her another bud if she didn't hush and keep still."

It was Zita's turn to get excited now, and being human she proceeded to do so.

"Constance! Constance Force!" she was exclaiming. "How did she get to living down here?"

"I'll tell you," offered the comprehensive Shammy. "They had a big loft up here and she was giving Tommy the fresh-air cure. I know Miss Force, she had charge of the cloakrooms, at the other school."

"Isn't this just great?" Cleo exclaimed. "I've had the most wonderful time. I knew I would find an adventure today. Shammy, can you come along home with us? I've got a few more flowers for you," she finished with a sigh of satisfaction. "I save every one I get." But she did not tell him she bought some of them herself.

The crowd had moved away, the ambulance and its trailing taxi were out of sight, when Cleo marched along between Shammy and Zita hurrying for the homeward subway.

"Your lesson!" exclaimed Zita guiltily. "What will mademoiselle say?"

"Who cares!" retorted Cleo. "This was worth a dozen lessons. We gave Tommy a regular shower."

And, could she have seen Constance Force, Tommy's mother, in the Mercy Hospital, fixing Tommy's flowers at that very moment, she would surely have been justified in her claims.

But the cards! There was one with a familiar name upon it, and wondering, the mother slipped this into her hand-bag to bring it back to Zita.

CHAPTER VIII

UNEXPECTED

THE great day dawned—Nellie was going to pay a visit to Cleo at the theatre where the charity play was to be given. A regular theatre. It was so intensely exciting to both Nellie and Cleo, that it is difficult to choose between their stories for this telling.

It was the day for dress rehearsal. Nellie had finished her school work and was given the half day's privilege.

"Now, don't get too excited," cautioned her mother. "You have got to eat a bite if you *are* going behind the scenes; it's an old joke, you know, that even actors eat," and she filled the soup plate almost to the little saucer rim, and set it before the palpitating Nellie.

"Don't you think I could wear my flowered taffeta and my pumps, mother?" she asked presently. "It's real warm out, and with my heavy coat——"

"It will be warm enough in the dressing room—too warm likely, but you won't find it cozy in the wings," explained the busy mother, cutting a slice of bread and placing it before her daughter.

"But in the taxi with Cleo——"

"Yes, you had better wear it," declared Mrs. Glennon, "for it will look best, as you say, going in Cleo's car. It's lovely of the child to stop for you, and it saves all the bother of some one else going."

"I'll feel just like an actress," chuckled Nellie.

"Take care you don't," interrupted the mother. "I'm thinking this stuff may turn your precious head, and you mind what I always told you about getting stage-struck. It's a bad thing." She shook her own head ruefully.

The advice was somewhat involved, as it was given by the same mother who so unwittingly unfolded to the fascinated Nellie all the stories of Glennon glory in things theatrical; her father's singing and all that. But now that little daughter was to set foot on the enchanted land, a foreboding of something imminent possessed Mrs. Glennon.

A half hour later a boy brought up the news that a car was waiting, and Nellie, in her flowered

taffeta, with her blue velvet hat, made over a pretty little poke frame, and her blue velveteen coat that brought out the color in her cheeks and softened the flashes from her eyes, hurried off, after kissing her mother fondly and wishing she were going along.

"I came as early as I possibly could," explained Cleo when Nellie sat beside her, on the cushioned seat. "I want to show you around before we have to get into our dressing rooms. How pretty you look!" she added, with consideration as well as candor.

"I can't believe I'm really going behind the scenes," breathed Nellie. "All the girls have been simply wild since I told them. I suppose I'll have to give a—lecture on just what happened," she concluded, dimpling.

"Isn't it queer how curious we always are to see things out of our reach?" reasoned Cleo. "If people were allowed to romp in and out back stage there would be no illusion, I suppose; and that's the very biggest thing. I hope Presto gets there early. I want you to meet her."

"I'd love to," said Nellie, smiling at the effect of that society mannerism. "Cleo, you look wonderful. Are you all made up?"

"Oh, no. Zita just put on the first coat," and

Cleo laughed girlishly. "I couldn't see the sights if I wore it all in the street."

"Oh, yes," agreed Nellie vaguely. How indifferent Cleo seemed. One would think she had a dress rehearsal every day.

Presently the car drew up to the small door in a dingy alley. Cleo's driver yanked open the door without leaving his seat, and scarcely turned his head as she and Nellie alighted. As they entered, Pete, the door man, was at his post, early as it was, and he beamed upon Cleo, which beam also included Nellie.

A group of noisy stage girls who evidently belonged to the theatre, were besieging the letter box which was posted directly inside the door. Nellie guessed how "fluttery" these young girls were in anticipation of good news from friends and admirers. Cleo passed along without noticing them—she had Shammy to depend upon.

A man who looked like a stage carpenter stood in the opening to the stage from the long fire-proof passageway. Nellie knew or guessed he might be the stage carpenter, for he wore striped "overall and jumper and a cap" and he fairly shed intelligence from his gentle blue eyes.

A flood of affectionate memories—those inspired by her mother's stories—surged over Nel-

lie as she looked at the man who held the post her own father used to hold. This little man seemed so quiet and efficient, whereas the world behind the footlights depended upon his skill, as master for its perfect revolution. The visitor marveled at his simplicity.

"Look, oh, do come and see our donkey!" exclaimed Cleo. "Here he is, come—on—Raisin," she coaxed, as a big fawn-colored animal with a back like a platform and a head like a burro, sauntered leisurely across the half-darkened stage.

He nosed right up to the two girls, and Cleo all but fell on his neck. Raisin was the pet of the charity play and when he "went down in the mine" he was always quickly liberated at the last stop.

"Isn't he lovely!" cooed Cleo. "Just see the shades of cream color around his ears."

Nellie, however, was more interested in shades of cream-colored blondes than in cream-colored donkeys, as the jumble and jangling of the girls now entering in small torrents (for the big chorus) claimed her attention.

There were blondes, of course, but they were all so much alike that Nellie was almost instantly losing her romantic illusions. A crowd of high

school girls might have been identical—perhaps some of these were just such students and had been given a part in the charity play.

A rather broad iron-clad stairs wound up from the center of the lower passageway.

"The chorus dressing rooms are up there," Cleo explained, "and ours are along here," indicating the row of small doors directly back of the last "drop."

Nellie followed her guide to the farthest end of the row.

"That's Miss Allison's room," again Cleo pointed out, "she's the solo dancer. Here is where I dress," she remarked next, for she compared a number on her card with that upon a near-by door.

Pushing open the door, the "dresser," or woman who was to assist Cleo, was found waiting.

"Oh, hello, Martha," Cleo exclaimed upon seeing the woman from the dancing school. "This is a friend of mine, Nellie Glennon," Cleo introduced simply. "She wants to see the wonders—of back stage."

"Yes, of course," agreed the dresser, and again Nellie was reminded "Mother used to do that."

"Just climb up on that trunk, Nellie," directed

Cleo. "Then you'll be out of the way and see all the sights."

The visitor complied promptly, first removing her coat at Martha's suggestion.

What a different Cleo she now beheld! Where was all the rebellious distaste of the charity play and its ways, in the girl who slipped out of her things, sat squarely before the broad mirror and inspected critically every stroke of the dresser's hands?

"Lots of time," commented Martha, "but I began with you, Cleo, as some of the others may be late."

"Glad you did, Martha. It will give me more time for Nellie," commented Cleo.

"Half-hour! Half-hour!" came a call from the outside, and Cleo jerked her head up suddenly.

"That isn't Shammy!" she exclaimed. "Isn't he here, Mattie?"

"Haven't seen him today, Cleo. But he may come in later," replied Mattie, surely most anxious to please.

"I hope he comes. I want Nellie to see him," said Cleo.

"Oh, he'll likely be around," argued the dresser. affably.

Nellie was now intent upon the make-up process before her. Cleo's face had been creamed and given a first coat of powder at home, and now the "red" was being administered. Not in tiny dabs and patches, on cheeks, chin, and eye corner, but all over her face and even on the eyelids!

Deftly Martha worked with strokes most accurate, yet seemingly so gentle. After that, one of the great powder puffs was puffed in a shower over the young face, and next, all the eye touches were cleverly administered. It all seemed so simple—another illusion dispelled, thought Nellie. It was not really different from the make-up process employed at her own school plays, only they did not use "so much" as Martha was using. This, the visitor reasoned, was because the theatre was a much larger place than a school hall and needed higher effects on account of distance from the stage.

Glancing from the fascinating process that was changing Cleo's pretty face into a vivid painting, Nellie inspected the room, or near-room, that included so much and demanded so little—in dimensions.

"About as big as our storeroom," she figured, for the Glennon home was part of a former pre-

tentious dwelling and some few families had the advantage of its first-planned "storerooms." Nellie's mother was among those so fortunate. Next, Nellie noticed the narrow little shelf that faced the three sides of this dressing room. It was covered with bright cretonne, and it was bright, clean and colorful. Over this, like sliced white lace "tidies," another covering lay. It was evident this last was washed weekly, for it was spic-span and fresh in spite of the array of powder puffs, cream jars, rouge boxes, pencils and other uncatalogued theatrical toilette articles.

The room was furnished with the good-sized mirror, two chairs and two trunks, evidently these belonging to the regular stage folks.

"There's a window back of you, Nell," said Cleo, as if reading the visitor's critical eye. "I suppose it is not opened except when it's awfully hot."

Nellie turned to the really big window that loomed up back of the trunk on which she was perched. It was draped with the red rose cretonne, and every rose was in full bloom, just like the hedge on the little toilette shelf.

"Fifteen minutes! Fifteen minutes, Martha!" Some one made this call directly at Cleo's door, and Martha replied promptly:

"All right, Mr. Bender!"

Nellie was feeling a little nervous for Cleo. Would she be dressed in time? What was she going to wear first?

But Martha had a costume in her hands and slipped it over Cleo's head almost before the bath-robe dropped from Cleo's form to the floor. A couple of snaps and it was all in place, then the slippers were held while her feet stuck into them and the little stage-queen was all ready for her call.

She smiled happily at Nellie's evident wonderment.

"Like me?" she said simply, and Nellie murmured something like:

"Um-m-m!"

"Come along and see what's going on. But take your hat off so they won't know you're a stranger. You look just like one of our girls; doesn't she, Mattie?"

"Sure does," agreed the agreeable Mattie. "Goin' to take part too?"

"I'd like to," admitted Nellie, sticking her hat on a peg that was already trying to support an entire outfit.

Cleo pushed her visitor along the narrow way that seemed strangely quiet and was now entirely

deserted. Even Raisin, the donkey, must be waiting for his cue somewhere, for he was no longer wandering around.

"Over here," whispered Cleo, just as the last call:

"Overture, overture!" was given to each door along the stone-faced hall.

Thus far there seemed little difference to Nellie between this and the school auditorium, except for these private rooms. "Just bigger" was all she figured it out to be.

"Here is a good place to peek," said Cleo, indicating a break in the wings that afforded a look at the stage before which the big curtain still formed its impervious barrier.

The last trailing notes of the overture were just sounding their warning to erstwhile players when some one called "Up" and the curtain rolled up! Everything was being done exactly as it would be on the night of the real performance.

Nellie was palpitant. She seemed to feel a concentrated anxiety for every unknown participant in the little play.

"There's Presto," whispered Cleo, as a girl so like herself as to seem identical, glided into a little space in front of a painted bridge.

"Exactly—like—you," murmured Nellie. Cleo

smiled and waved to the girl in the curly blonde wig. Nellie could see now that Cleo's costume was that of a peasant child. It appeared colorless but was nearly gray, and it seemed very slimy, although it was likely made of some cotton stuff as nearly indefinite as any material made in America ever can be. Over it was an apron with bib (all sewed on), and Cleo's curls were free even from the restraint of a bonnet, cap or ribbon.

The other girl was dressed in a twin outfit, and only her dark eyes, that now surveyed Nellie surreptitiously, marked the difference in the two girls. Presto looked over Nellie's way but was undeniably shy, for she turned quickly when she found Nellie was watching her. Nellie naturally stared—people behind the scenes did not seem exactly like private individuals or little amateurs as she surveyed them.

The play was on now! Girls were talking on the stage. The prompter could be heard occasionally. How perfectly exact everything seemed from Nellie's angle! No one crossed in front of another, only the principals ever walked "up stage" and when the "operator," the light engineer, shifted one of his lamps it went directly on the person or spot it was plainly intended for.

The theatre was all in darkness out front, although people were there to criticize.

This precision and the orderliness so evident at the approaches to the stage (not a word was spoken nor a noisy move made in the wings) all impressed the visitor as being the keynote to the perfect play now unfolding. How carefully the girls must have been trained! They acted like professionals. Nellie compared the school work with this. No wonder Cleo complained of all the lessons this play had required, all the training it had involved. It struck Nellie as being almost too well prepared. Why did mere girls and boys need to be so perfectly trained?

A slight stir from the stairs brought with it a band of peasant girls.

"Be careful," whispered Cleo. "Move over there. Quick! I have to go on now," and she skipped in, before the others, like the woodland nymph she represented.

For a moment Nellie forgot everything but the fact that "Cleo was on." She stood spellbound while the chorus brushed around her.

Suddenly something moved; she tried to follow it but a hand held her.

"Keep still!" whispered a girl. "You're on!"

And then Nellie looked down at the crowd of

society people who were there as an audience. This was the children's play their charity board was sponsoring and it was highly important that they should see it and be perfectly satisfied with every part of it before it should be given in public. These ladies filled quite a number of seats out front, and even in the darkness Nellie knew they were there. She tried to escape, to get back of the scenes again, but as she did so she felt something shifted back of her, apparently as solid and impregnable as a stone wall.

She could not break through that. And she could not upset the girls' dance by attempting to get to some other place in that painted wall where a break might be found. No, she must cause no disorder; that Nellie realized instantly. She must stay just where she was and do what she could to appear like the girls around her. But how her heart thumped and her eyes blurred! She would have given almost anything to be away from all this, to be back in her own mother's kitchen helping with the work, or out on a dingy little street contradicting Jimmie, who always had to be contradicted, or up in Cleo's lovely soft bed-room—any place but here!

Yet here she was and here she had to stay!

CHAPTER IX

THE IMPROMPTU

TIME lost its measure. It might have been moments or it might have been years; it might even have been a timeless dream, but now Nellie's eyes made out real faces in the uninterrupted blur, she was conscious of girls standing near her and, as compelling music forced her to do so, she swayed with these girls, first right, then left, then a few steps forward.

Why, it was just like the dance of the dryads they had given in the neighborhood theatre!

And it was fascinating to do it now in that perfect way. Impossible to resist the lure of that time.

Becoming conscious gradually, Nellie glanced down at her bright flowered dress. She could see the skirts the other girls wore were also flowered and, yes, the other girls wore light stockings and pumps!

Wasn't Nellie fortunate to be so well costumed?

"Keep it up, Nell," Cleo whispered as she shot by, escaping from the prince.

Presently the dance ceased: Cleo as the pilgrim was escorted to a swing seat in a one-sided tree, and the prince approached the chorus to select those who were to dance before his woodland prisoner.

At first Nellie was so much interested her reason seemed paralyzed; she was not worrying about the propriety of her cyclonic debut; but now she caught the eye of the trainer from the wings and that eye was questioning.

"First rate," came a rather rich voice, and Nellie saw Presto at her side. "Don't you get nervous, you are all right," the girl encouraged.

This reassurance checked, somewhat, a thumping heart, and then Nellie noticed the other girls were almost all larger than she—one or two with old faces were, however, quite as small. Next she made out that she happened to fall in on the very center of the line, and this she fancied, was rather fortunate.

But along came the prince! And Cleo said he was so tricky and full of fun! Suppose he should

deliberately choose her, the new girl, to dance before the pilgrim!

"And who shall please the little stranger? Who shall dance away her fears? Is it you—or you or you——" He was standing before the quaking Nellie. Now he doffed his feathered cap in a prince charming salute.

"Oh!" breathed Nellie secretly. "I'll die—soon!"

"Come hither! Come hither from woodland and
vale,
Fair nymphs of the forest, from hillside and
dale."

"Don't; take some one else."

It was like a prompter's order and the prince moved slightly to the left and extended his hand to the girl outside the danger line.

She was not Nellie!

The relief was almost collapsing in its fullness. If only now Nellie could escape!

Up in front of Cleo the dancer was led and sprightly she danced; but after all, thought the intruder, she could have done that dance. It was the same combination of steps she learned long ago for the cantata. Watching the dancer,

self-consciousness now faded away into keen interest.

If only her mother did not object so to stage work what would she say to this? And how pretty Cleo looked! Just like a picture on a calendar—the kind that has wonderful trees, bright sunsets and a girl in a tree-limb swing.

The dancer dropped a sweeping bow and capered back to the line. She was applauded generously, and Nellie could feel the lively flutter of recognition the soloist was making at her side.

And now Cleo was dancing!

Spellbound Nellie watched her. The women out front had evaporated, the chorus was in a mist, but Cleo was dancing like a fawn before Nellie's fascinated eyes.

Yes, she was a wonderful little dancer, and she moved about freely, even crossing and going up stage. Nellie knew only the most important characters were allowed to do that.

Presently Cleo seemed to fly to the very center of the stage and spin there like a living top. Round and round until the motion seemed motionless. The spotlight was played on the pin-wheel, and Nellie was caught in its glow. Her own pretty face in its "Evening Prayer" curls was not entirely lost to those around her

and among them was the eagle-eyed trainer.

"Down! Down!" droned a voice, and down the big curtain was coming. Now she would escape.

"Don't move!" cautioned the hidden mentor quietly, and the curtain went up again, just as Nellie shifted around to her place in line.

"Flowers," said a girl with a poppy skirt and green waist. "How perfectly silly at a rehearsal! I wonder what she does with them." Her remarks were sarcastically directed towards Cleo.

"That's to see how she'll take them at the play," remarked a companion in an undertone, but Nellie heard it. And she smiled as she thought of the flower trust, and gazed wonderingly at the great bunch of pink roses Cleo was bowing over. Her Aunt Sylvia was overdoing her encouragement, surely. And even the ladies out front were heard murmuring, perhaps critically.

The curtain was down at last, but with the relief from stage fright came the thought of retribution. What would the trainer say?

The girls were going off very orderly and a man's voice called out:

"Strike!"

Before Cleo could reach her frightened little

friend the men were busy changing "the set." The "grips and property men" were gripping and shifting; things were going up in the air to be swung out of sight from the big iron gridiron, flies were flying and wings were winging, all so skillfully and almost silently into place that Cleo had to propel Nellie with actual force through the maze of effects built in and painted on the big panorama.

"Oh!" sighed Nellie adequately.

"Wonderful!" breathed Cleo. "Hurry!" This last word gave the key to the situation. They must escape before any one could question them.

They were the last off the stage but few reached dressing rooms sooner, and when Cleo turned the key in the door and shoved the trembling Nellie onto the biggest trunk, she doubled up with laughter.

Then she laughed and she gasped and she moaned with merriment.

"You—didn't—do—that purposely," Nellie managed to inject in the whirlwind.

"'Course I didn't. I told you to jump back. I—of course—I shouldn't have waited for the cue—— But oh, when I saw you! And right center. Nelly-delly-diddle-dum! I shall never

forget this day if I live to be a hundred!" And again she hugged her knees and almost rolled off the chair.

"Was it—terrible?"

"Terrible? It was wonderful. You just wait and see if Bender isn't after you—he always wants extras," said Cleo. "And honestly, Nell, you looked too cute, and I saw how well you danced."

This brought a rift in the cloud of fear and it slashed clear through to the silver lining.

"Now what will happen?" Nellie asked anxiously.

"Nothing now. Every one is too busy. But just wait until I put these flowers in the jar. Aunt Sylvia has a regular order and the florist sends them every chance he gets. But I don't care what the girls think; we need them. Then I'll take you up to the girls' dressing room. They'll be crazy to know all about it. Some of our girls are up there with the hired chorus."

"Oh, I'd rather not," faltered Nellie, getting a look in the glass and making sure it was her own human face she saw there reflected. "I wish—I could slip out—home, Cleo."

A tap at the door startled them. Cleo jumped up and Nellie slid down behind the trunk.

Turning the key after making sure Nellie's head did not stick up too much from its hiding place, Cleo opened the door to face Mr. Bender, the trainer.

"Oh, Mr. Bender——" she parried.

"Hello, lassie," greeted the tall man, smiling vaguely. "Where is your friend?"

"My friend?"

"Now, now! Come, little girl, what have you done with Dolly Varden?" He stood in the doorway and furnished a capacity audience there.

"Oh, was it very dreadful?" Cleo had no cause to pretend it might have been dreadful, in fact, she knew very well it had been pretty good.

"Not so bad but rather—sudden," the manager replied. "But where is she?"

Nellie crumpled lower in her corner. Her hand came flat upon an upright pin and its sharp prick diverted her impending fear. She looked up and could see that the edge of the great wardrobe trunk was overhanging. This assured her of safety.

Meanwhile Cleo was rather panicky. She felt it would be silly to call Nellie out and yet——

Perhaps it meant something important for Nellie! Suppose it would give her a chance to learn to sing.

But would Nellie's mother object?

"She really was so frightened, Mr. Bender," Cleo temporized to cover a slight sound from the trunk fortress. "You know it was entirely an accident."

"Oh, surely: of course, I know," he replied skeptically. "I've seen those cyclonic debuts before. But this wasn't so bad. I don't see why you let her escape, however——" He was turning away at last, and when his solo step sounded down the stone hallway, Cleo was so full of pent-up glee she wanted to drag Nellie from her lair by the brown curls of her head—just to make things dramatic. But she didn't: Nellie crawled out.

"Goblins and gooseberries! I didn't tell him you were gone!" gasped Cleo, again locking the door.

"But I'm so glad he thought so!" moaned Nellie. "Cleo, do let me out—the side door!"

"The side door!" squealed Cleo. "What do you think this is?" and she laughed merrily. "No indeedy. I've got a long wait and scarcely any dressing to do. I'm going to take you up to see the other girls. There's such a flock of them; I don't know myself where they all come from."

"Oh, Cleo, please!" begged Nellie. "I'm so

nervous. I'd love to see them, but don't let's go up today."

"You baby! Don't you want to see the big make-up scene? They have to go in a sea-side act next while I am lost, you know, and I'm sure you will love to see them dressing. Come along, quick! I must be back here when Martha comes to help me change."

It was useless for Nellie to hold back; Cleo was literally dragging her forward in a sort of ducking-scoot, along the dark narrow passage that was broken by the iron stairway to the large dressing room. She was thrilled in spite of her agitation. How eagerly she always scanned that sort of picture and now she was going to see the original!

Would she really want to be a part in this great picture? Would it be wonderful as she had dreamed it? Was the glare of the footlights all sent in from the front and was the life that this glare illumined really dark and dreary, with gray stone halls and black iron stairways?

Nellie was not putting all this into words, but with a girl's natural intuition the big question was asked in a single simple sentence:

"Is this *it*?"

"Hard on slippers," commented Cleo as she

led the way, "but everything must be fireproof. Did you notice our nice fireman on the way up? He's so jolly and we all just feel he could blow a fire out with his breath! He's such a good, careful fireman," intoned Cleo loyally. "You see, we have already had a number of other rehearsals here but *this* is the big one."

Upstairs it was different. Voices and laughter "cheered the travellers on their way," and when Cleo tapped at a half-opened door the cause of the cheer was apparent.

Girls, girls and girls!

Dressing, laughing, giggling, singing, humming, whistling, and even groaning—one girl could not put her size six foot into a size five slipper without groaning.

"Come right on in, Kiddie," called out a musical voice from the grand chorus. "We have just been talking about you——" Evidently she now saw Nellie, although Nellie could not identify the soloist in the tumult.

"This is our new member," announced Cleo gaily, urging Nellie forward. "She made her debut, as you saw, without rehearsal or announcement."

"Yes, we saw," replied the girl with the powder puff on a stick that made easy dusting. "And we

thought she made a hit." This was added with the most pleasant and friendly smile for Nellie.

"What happened?" drawled another from slipper troubles.

"Accident," repeated Cleo.

"But she sure can dance!" declared some one else showing incredulity for the accident idea.

"Yes, she has parts in the neighborhood school plays," explained Cleo, anxious to do Nellie full justice. "But this was my fault, of course."

"But you are such a pet, Cleo, you needn't worry much." This came from the depths of pink ruffles, topped off with a blonde head and supported by a girl called Mabel.

"Mabs, I'm not going to worry," replied Cleo, "but we did duck, didn't we, Nell?"

"I know *I* did," confessed Nellie self-consciously. She was now within the room of mystery, and was seated upon the stool Cleo had just swept clear of at least five miscellaneous garments.

"Second Act!" came an imperative call from the outside.

"Right-o!" sang back a quartette in the same imperative cadence.

"Shouldn't we go?" Nellie said aside to Cleo. This business of getting dressed and then getting

down stairs and reaching out front in time and on time, was nerve-racking to the novice spectator.

"Lots of time," replied Cleo. "I want you to see everything, Nell."

"Don't miss Spuds over here," called out a very jolly girl who was teasing another with the hint of Ireland. "She would like to be interviewed on the newest turf-bog crops."

"Spuds" was not too hurried to serve a few direct clips to this aggressor, and in spite of possible disaster, she daubed grease on a cheek that had already been treated with a finishing coat of powder.

"Hurry up over there!" warned the girl at the center of the long table. "We don't want to see you two hitching up as you go. Get properly hitched up right now."

This seemed like sensible and timely advice, and presently the small troupe concentrated on finishing up. This afforded Nellie a chance to look over the room critically, and to her eager eyes it all looked quite as alluring as her romantic mind had imagined it.

And this was a chorus girls' dressing room, being used by a fashionable girls' school for a big charity play.

CHAPTER X

SIGHTSEEING

It was a big room and had ample windows and they were not nailed shut, for the wash hangings even now blew in and out sociably. Through the middle of the room was a long table with mirrors built in the center, and with lights hanging over it. The mirrors were double-faced and the dresser was double-drawered, so that the girls sat on both sides and "made up" as if before individual dressing tables. Every girl had her own drawer, although judging from the conversation floating about through the powder-puff clouds, it appeared some girls found their neighbor's compartment too convenient to be generally satisfactory. Mabel should not dip into Mazie's paint jar, and Clare was expected to know the difference between her own and Helen's black sticks, it was openly claimed. Yet mistakes will happen and they did.

As the faces had been made up for the first act retouching was all that seemed needed now, that

and redressing for the sea-side scene; but in spite of their haste and the actual need of it, Nellie was favored with as many smiles and friendly little remarks as the happy group could find time to bestow upon her. She had no idea these girls would be so friendly.

Two "dressers" were going about quietly snapping snaps, hooking hooks and inspecting the magical costumes that seemed constructed like elastic bands and that looked like perfectly good summer dresses. They dropped over the head or were stepped into with as little coaxing as might be given a pair of "coveralls." They seemed to fit well, certainly looked "stunning" and could be entirely adjusted without a single groan or complaint.

Nellie marvelled as she watched the simple process. Why couldn't all dresses work that way?

"Here, Tillie," called a black-haired girl with eyes that sparkled like stars under her thickened lashes. "Please tack this ruffle some place. I caught it on a nail and it was tickled to death with the nail. Stuck to it the full length of the room. Just look at the endless serial," and she wheeled around unwinding the refractory strip as she went. The needle and thread in Tillie's



"COME LITTLE GIRL, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH
DOLLY VARDEN."

nimble fingers quickly put the pink organdie back some place, although it could no longer be classed as a ruffle.

Cleo was up at the far end of the room talking to a girl who was just inspecting her yellow frills in the long wall glass.

"She is a perfect dear," declared the golden girl, referring to Nellie. "I honestly thought we were being treated to a surprise. Just wait and see if Mr. Bender doesn't want to put her on. We need more little girls. And if he does—Cleo," with mock severity, "you may expect Brick-top to call on you about it." The flaming red hair this girl was accountable for, explained her self-administered rebuke included in "brick-top."

The ruffle chorus seemed bewitching even up there in the crowded dressing room; tunes were hummed, dance steps tried, opinions exchanged and all went merrily as a holiday. No one seemed worried but Nellie—how could they be sure they wouldn't be late? And it seemed so far away from the stage, up there.

"Are you studying?" Green-ruffles asked her pleasantly. "You like dancing, don't you?"

"I love it," replied Nellie shyly, "and I take lessons at the community class."

"Oh, do you? I know a teacher there. She was with me at Vicks. But she was too high-brow for this sort of work. We always knew she would go to training. And I've heard they give splendid shows over there. Here, Belle, this belongs to you," offering a nickel to the tall girl in Honey-dew ruffles. "I found it in the cream jar after you and Millie settled up. You shouldn't be so absent-minded. You might offer your puff to the conductor."

"If you had my troubles you would be absent-minded too, Angie," replied Honey-dew. She was ruffling up the ruffle shower with little shakes and jerks and finally swirled away before Angie could make answer.

"She's just pretending. That girl has an aunt and a cousin who watch her like hawks. Peacock is a girl from the west who writes books, has an apartment and always gave the girls a good time. Now she's going off to write leisurely, on the strength of that inherited few hundred and the girls are all wailing," confided Angie to wide-eyed Nellie. What a curious mixture of girls!

They were ready now and getting in line like regular schoolgirls. Parasols in hand, ready to shoot up when the music prompted, summer ruffles of rainbow hues made in skirts the cute

length, between grammar and high schools, as Nellie might have described them, then the baby waists with elbow sleeves and the bobbed heads; all this made the girls look even more youthful than those of grammar grades. "Spuds," for instance, seemed young enough for the primary.

"Now don't step on my toes going down," begged Mabel. "These pumps are not insured, neither are my toesies."

"Think I'm going down head first, Mab? I might step on your heels but not your toes!"

"Act called!" came the announcement, and even as they trooped off, the irresistible impulse to "cut up" would break out along the lines.

"Just real girls," Nellie was deciding, "and not a bit like I imagined them."

"I suppose they all like this," she said in an undertone to Cleo.

"Oh, it's more fun than being at class, of course," replied Cleo.

One member of the chorus lingered for a few minutes after the others trooped down. She would skip in alone when the sea-side girls had raised their striped parasols to the tune of a rollicking summer day song, and she would dance in a challenge to the waves painted on "flats" that hung from the big gridiron overhead.

"Cleo," she said kindly and confidently. "Where is your aunt? Who came with you?"

"Aunt Sylvia is away, and we—two came alone," confessed Cleo, falteringly at this admission.

"My dear!" exclaimed the older girl. "You know it is against the rules for you little kiddies to be around the theatre alone, and Mr. Warwick is most particular about his children and the rules. I suppose you didn't think it was necessary to tag some one along, did you?" She smiled like a big sister to the children who seemed babes in foreign surroundings. "But I would, if I were you, run along quickly to your own room and not let eagle-eyed Peter catch you. Pete is kind, you know, but he thinks he's everybody's daddy around here. Did you have a nice time?" she asked Nellie to soften her warning. "I saw you dance and I think you have a very good teacher." The compliment was delicate and much more acceptable to Nellie than a direct reference to herself might have been.

"Thanks, Molly," spoke up Cleo. "I knew I was taking a chance in coming alone, but I just wanted Nell to see everything without being fussed about. She has been longing for this great day," with an affectionate glance at Dolly-Varden Nell. "I have to get ready for the dark scene

now. Then Nell will see how my double is going to fool the people when they come to the big show."

Molly was such a pretty girl and so naturally attractive that Nellie watched her abstractedly, as she fluttered off in the same sort of airy ruffled costume her companions were now dancing in below.

"Take a good look, Nell," Cleo whispered. "This may be your last chance for a while," and she picked up the biggest powder puff in sight to powder Nellie's dimpled face and choke her in the cyclone clouds of "Spuds's" most dependable make-up.

"Souvenir!" said Cleo coyly.

Nellie blew away the clouds and appealed to her companion.

"Cleo, I wish I could slip home——"

"The side door," laughed Cleo, mocking Nellie's previous reference to escape. "Now, sister-mine, if you think you are going to desert me like this, and leave me to the mercy of Daddy Pete! Don't you know two girls are better than one at bamboozling? And he is just bound to ask me where my chaperon is, where my aunt is, and where my little sister is. It will be lots easier if I can produce at least the little sister. We were

warned to bring our own chaperones with us."

"Oh, all right, of course, I was only thinking," stammered Nellie. The stage-fright from her unexpected appearance would break in upon the temporary security of back stage, far away that she was, and being merely Nellie, with no former experience to lead her right in the present flutter and agitation, she naturally wanted to run.

"There's the second scene, called. Come along, Nellie. Martha will think I have abandoned my cay-reer!" chirped Cleo, who once again led her companion through the maze of illusions dispelled. At the foot of the stairs they encountered a boy. He was not in uniform, was grinning, and his freckles pricked the dark, and his hair was unmistakably red.

"Shammy!" whispered Cleo in a very long breath that hissed at the end. "Where have you been?"

"To see Tommy! S-s-sh! Raisin got lost and I'll be blamed. Have you seen him?"

"Don't you worry, Sham. Raisin couldn't get lost. It's just a trick to scare you," consoled Cleo, beaming on her favorite. "I have to hurry and change. This is Nellie, and oh, we have such a lot to tell you! Wait for us and I'll drive you home! We came all alone!"

But Shammy was not to have the promised ride, for things really had gone wrong with Raisin, and at that very moment he was out in the street dodging autos, after making a tragic escape from the property door of the big theatre.

Cleo and Nellie found Martha awaiting them in a state of wild excitement.

"Cleo dear," she exclaimed. "Where ever were you? Things have gone queer around this place today. First, that red-head Patsy or Shamming, whatever his name is, begged off and left a lot of work for the rest of us—running about with messages and the like o' that; then that jack-ass they call Raisin walks out the freight elevator door, and no sooner is he missed than I come in here and find you gone. Tell me now, dearie, isn't that enough for a poor old lady like Martha Williams, all to happen in one day?"

"Oh, we were only looking around, Mattie," soothed Cleo. "Nellie has never been here before, you know, but her mother used to be a dresser in some theatre——"

"My dear, I'm not complainin', I'm just explainin'," said Mattie. "But come along and change. I promised to give that new girl a hand. She's as nervous as a cat, and as pretty as a picture. She'll get over her nerves quick enough

when she gets goin'. I told her it was like a tonic to hear the music. Listen now, they're good natured this afternoon, but all the trouble is back here." She had Cleo's spangled dress all hooked up and was now securing the glittering star on her forehead with a silver band.

Guilt still pursued Nellie. Had she brought trouble with her careless curiosity? Things often happened in flocks that way, she reflected, and somehow the day of her dreams was gathering shadows.

"Where's Presto?" Cleo asked the woman. "I haven't run across her any place. Hope she's all ready to do my drop for me."

"That dear little thing is so quiet she just sits in a corner and waits for her cue. What ails the child anyhow?" Martha questioned suddenly. "Seems to me there's something queer about her, and yet she's a perfect lady. There now, you're all ready," with an affectionate pat. "Now I'll go see what I can do to quiet the nervous one. Isn't it awful when they're that way?"

"Awful!" agreed Cleo, with a funny face smirked at Nellie, whose own personal nervousness was not, by any means, a secret from her discerning friend.

CHAPTER XI

THE REACTION

IT had been a wonderful day for Nellie and she was now making copious notes of it all in her little red diary; for everything, every item, seemed too precious to be trusted to mere memory. So she wrote, and she wrote and she re-wrote until her mother insisted she lay aside the task and not "go crazy altogether over the trip to a playhouse."

Then Nellie put away the small book and its small slip-in pencil, but her mind was not so easily managed. The awful feeling of being out before those strange women and among all those strange girls! That in itself was as vivid as a shock in its recurring sensations. Then, there was the scene in the big dressing room, and the kindness that had been shown her here. Yes, those girls were all considerate and polite, even to an intruder.

But Cleo's dancing furnished the second and

biggest thrill. How naturally Cleo did it all, and how little it seemed to worry her! That must be genius, Nellie decided, and her own wild excitement, her thumping heart and throbbing head, all that must be opposed to genius even in the bud. She wondered would or could she ever learn to really sing. Oh, to be a real professional singer! She hummed a simple little tune once or twice and never knew she was doing it.

Prayers said and mother's kiss accepted, Nellie thought it all over again, and even the warning of very late hours rung off from the big kitchen clock did not successfully alter her decision.

The girls' play had been wonderful, and because Molly, from the chorus, had taken charge of Nellie, and had stood by her in the wings during that act when she was free to do so, the sense of protection added the one requirement to Nellie's complete enjoyment.

Directly after the big scene, where Cleo came over the hills like a fairy in her spangles, her crown, and with her staff bejewelled and be-decked, Molly took charge of Nellie, who, up to that time, had insisted on remaining shut in the small dressing room to avoid further mistakes.

And if she had not come out with Miss Molly Matthews she would have missed the scene where

Presto, the shyest girl, did so many remarkable "turns" for which Cleo was forced to accept credit.

When it was all over, the three little girls, Cleo, Nellie, and Presto, had a good laugh over Nellie's debut. Then the shy, dark-eyed girl made friends, and Cleo was not slow to guess that Nellie's personality was accountable for this favor. Nellie was so simple, so plain and so naturally girlish. Cleo never could hope to be understood in her longing for the same attributes. Every one regarded her as different and "stand-offish"; only Shammy ever tried to be really good friends with the so called popular girl; "pampered" would have been the more correct term.

Cleo confided in Nellie her hope that Presto would finally be won over, and when the curtain had been rung down on the very last scene, and the truant donkey, Raisin, was led back from his wild drive to see the big city, the girl who had been engaged by Aunt Sylvia and was being paid to help Cleo, surprised all the other girls who were waiting to welcome Raisin back as the recovered prodigal, by her trick riding of the good-natured donkey. Raisin could kick and always did kick under provocation, and the way he "reared up" when Presto stood on his broad back

and did stunts that upset his equanimity, attested to the talent still thriving. Presto was not like the other girls; any one could see that.

Nellie tittered aloud now as she recalled the fun. The clock was groaning again—going to strike! She must get to sleep, but there was so much to think about and it was all so delicious!

And her mind would insist upon going over it all again. She remembered how they had escaped the trainer, Mr. Bender, and that when the reception was being held for Raisin, only Pete, the door man, and a few of the older girls, besides the children with their watchful mothers, were around. Molly had warned Cleo not to come alone to the theatre ever again, and she rode home with them, first to Nellie's and then on to Cleo's apartment. Strange they should be so particular and with two girls together, thought Nellie. But she didn't know the responsibility that even a big charity play may involve.

Some one was passing through the tenement hall now. Wide-awake Nellie recognized the shuffling step as that of Mr. Haggerty, a "ticket-chopper" at the ferry. It must be almost midnight. He always worked until eleven. Smoothing the disordered quilts and turning her pillow quietly, Nellie determined again to get to

sleep, and this time the scenes from the theatre became confused with the ride in the taxi, and the circus tricks Presto performed with Raisin were shifted to the one and only circus Nellie had ever attended, until finally the great day and its experience all fell away into a regular, even breathing, and there was nothing left but sleep.

Followed days when Cleo was too busy to see even Nellie. Everything was laid aside for the great charity play. But it was finally over, and it had been the success predicted for it. Press notices were generous to all the participants, and among those most favored was the pretty little Cleo Kimball, "daughter of the late, well-known author," so the papers said.

But none of this seemed to affect Cleo. She was glad it was all over, and that she could quiet down again to the tasks, not as agreeable, really, but not as much disliked as had been all that rehearsing and excitement.

When another Sunday came around Cleo enjoyed a restful period, with a bus ride, followed by a long walk in the park, and now she was claiming Zita's undivided attention and insisting upon being told the story of stories.

"I can't tell you just why it is, Zita," she confided, curled up on the big divan, with Zita in the

Turkish chair near by, "but I always feel that baby story is part of my life. Tell me again how the distracted mother abandoned the little one."

"She was indeed distracted," replied Zita, "and the shock of her young husband's sudden death almost destroyed her reason. The baby seemed to her as being cheated, when its father died that way, and when she read of a wealthy woman who was taking care of unfortunate little ones, and was keeping a satin quilted basket on her porch to receive them, the poor demented woman found her way there somehow, and placed her little darling in that basket. Then it was gone." Zita's voice scarcely whispered the last few words.

"And she had no way of tracing the baby?" pressed Cleo.

"She was so very ill for a time, that the baby search could not be properly attended to," said Zita, very gently. "But quickly as possible a general search was made."

"You were with her?"

"Yes, I—was with her——"

"Don't you like to talk of it, Zita dear?"

"Sometimes I have to talk of it," and Zita sighed heavily. "And sometimes I feel——"

"Zita, did you know I am going to try to find that—baby?"

"Cleo darling! What are you talking about?" burst out the astonished Zita. The magazine fell from her fingers and lay in a disfigured heap on the floor: her startled eyes searched those of the girl before her—they demanded proof, something real for that surprising statement.

"Now, don't get so tragic, Zita-Wita," replied Cleo quickly. "I may not be able to find her, of course. But it would mean a very great deal to you if I could, wouldn't it?"

"Dear child, I may be foolish in confiding in you, but sometimes my heart seems just bursting and you have been such a baby I have always felt safe in telling the story. But now I see I have made a mistake. You are no longer a baby to listen to my sorrows impersonally. I should not—have told you."

"I have known for years, Zita, that you had a heart ache, and I have been working for a long time on a plan to relieve it," said Cleo, suddenly serious and certainly wise. "I have nothing else in the whole world of my very own but ambition to solve your mystery. It may be silly and romantic, of course, but don't you think every girl gets romantic at my age?"

The blue eyes confessed frankly, and the young girl again begged a chance for reality—a real

mystery really solved by a real, live natural girl. And that she, Cleo, the girl who had too much of everything should have a part in an alluring test of brains and energy. That she should rank with the brave girls she read so much about, poor girls, loyal girls, smart girls; all this was overwhelming her with something like daring. She gathered determination even as she talked to the astonished Zita.

Finally Cleo drew the head of her companion over to her own heart. "Zita dear," she whispered, "am I a nuisance? Have I been a—spy to get all this from you when you thought you were just telling me baby stories?"

"No, dear. I knew you were growing wise but I was too weak myself to fight the temptation for confidences. You don't know, little girl, what a tyrant a hungry heart can be."

"Could you tell me, is the lost child's mother alive?" Cleo asked cautiously.

"Yes: that is the hardest part of it."

"And she feels, of course, that she threw her baby away?" This was surely a child's way of putting it.

"Yes; she continually talks that way, even though her mind has cleared."

"And it all happened right here in this city?"

Cleo was mentally recording every answer.

"Yes. But, child, it was—this girl would be about your age if she is alive," reflected Zita. How could one find a baby grown to girlhood?

"That's nothing. I have found out that all the child-caring places here are most carefully kept track of, and in spite of the years the story of the lady with the satin baby-basket on her front stoop is not forgotten. Shammy's mother remembers it well, so there!"

There it was again! The influence of Shammy. Zita smiled tolerantly.

"So you and Shammy are organizing a detective bureau?"

"How did you guess? We have done exactly that, and we are going to solve *your* mystery first," burst out the impetuous girl. "And now we have other members in our—on our staff," she finished, laughing at the words that sounded foolish when spoken aloud but were so thrilling when all thought out secretly. "You see, we have Nellie, and she has a little friend Timmie; then there's Tommy, in the hospital you know. And his mother knows you——"

"Yes," admitted Zita. "I knew her long ago. We were all young girls together."

"And why did you get so—so separated?"

The young woman turned her head to avoid the light from the shaded lamp, but she did not answer.

"Oh, do forgive me, Zita. I'm foolish and silly, and I go—too far," admitted Cleo, conscience-stricken. "You have a right to your own secrets, and if I ever again attempt to—to break in on them, you just tell me I have no right to do so," finished Cleo severely.

But Zita shook her head and smiled. The girl's questions might be searching, but they were only natural and meant kindly.

"You don't mind if I ask about the baby?" Cleo ventured after a respectful pause.

"Oh, no, dear. But you see, I didn't know the baby very well, she went away when she was so very tiny."

"Was she light or dark?"

"Little babies are apt to change color. A black-haired infant may become a blonde young girl."

"Zita, I'm not possibly that lost baby, am I?"

"No, indeed." A low laugh gave further assurance.

"Because Shammy said I might be. His mother remembers a lot of thing——"

"What does she remember?" The question was put decidedly.

"Well, that Aunt Sylvia was only daddy's step sister and Shammy says she is absolutely no relation to *me*."

It was out. That much of Cleo's secret crusade was now admitted. She was evidently tracing her ancestry, critically.

"What sort of woman is Shammy's mother?" asked Zita. "I don't see why she encourages children in this sort of thing."

"Now, Zita. Don't go and get cross. Mrs. Malanaphy just answers questions—same as you do. And she hasn't any idea of encouraging us. You see, I have been getting some information from you, and I'm sure *you* wouldn't do anything like that."

The argument was sound. Zita smiled again and stroked the yellow head that lay in her arms.

"Of course you have a right to know, dear. Your Aunt Sylvia is not actually related, but she was made one of your guardians."

"And what about you?"

"I was your dear mother's girlhood friend."

And Cleo had to be content with those disjointed facts. But she wrote a long letter to

Nellie the very next morning. It was a queer sort of letter, even Nellie must have found it so, but one part was not a bit confused. That was about the Lady-Cloud the girls had visioned on the roof when Nellie paid her visit to Cleo.

"I am sure," Cleo wrote, "that cloud was alive and I am just as sure it wasn't anybody drying her hair or taking some crazy exercise, although the ladies do the craziest things like that, you could or could not ever imagine."

"But I am not going to let the boys—your Timmie and my Shammy—know anything about that part," the letter continued. "I do all the detective work around here. It's too important for the boys to handle, but I'll tell you about it, Nell, when I have a good chance to try my plan."

So Cleo wrote to her little friend, but Zita could not possibly guess what direction the detective work was to be operated in.

Yet she worried; Cleo would soon have to have a stronger hand than hers to guide her if she persisted in these romantic notions.

CHAPTER XII

WHAT THE GROWN-UPS THOUGHT

CLEO's outburst of confidence continued to worry the maid until she finally sent for Mrs. Glennon to come and talk things over with her.

"Why, it's sheer nonsense," declared the reliable woman when Zita finished relating the newest chapter in Cleo's exploits. "What can those children do in a thing like that?"

"So I've been telling myself, but she is so determined that she might do something risky," replied Zita. The two were conferring in the apartment paid for out of the too abundant allowance made for Cleo's care. "You see, Rose," (to Mrs. Glennon) "I feel doubly responsible for her. There was Winnie, her darling mother and my chum, and I know how she would feel about Sylvia's guardianship. If I say a word against Sylvia's wishes she can dismiss me, and then what would become of Cleo and what of——"

"Tut, now there! Don't be looking on the

dark side. There's my own little Nellie," Mrs. Glennon began. "She takes the craziest notions to do the silliest things. I guess we forget, Zita, what we used to do ourselves at their age. It seems to me Cleo has been cheated. She has what other folks might want but not what she wants herself," she said, dryly. "Just give her her head, as they say, and keep an eye on from a little distance. It can't do a bit of harm in dreaming about finding that baby, and girls are so—so romantic, they've got to be dreaming about something."

"But who ever heard of a little girl actually wanting to be a detective?" Zita considered, laughing lightly at the idea.

"No different from wanting to be a carpenter, and Nell has lately taken to sawing and hammering. Why, she built a box for the soap and scouring powder stuff, put it up, neat as you please, over the sink, and just says her daddy was a stage carpenter and she was going to take his place around the house. Seems to me, Zita, they do things like that out of sheer love for the ones who are gone."

"But there were no detectives in Cleo's family," argued Zita by way of comparing notes.

"The love part is for you. She's a wise little

girl, and she knows it is the baby's loss that hangs over you; so for love, you see, the little dear has decided to turn detective," declared Mrs. Glennon. "And the uncanny thing of it all is the way she goes about it. Looking for records and papers of the Perry Mansion. These babies know more than I would myself in such a search. Where did she learn it all, do you think?" inquired Mrs. Glennon, plainly puzzled.

"Just from reading," replied the other, rather dolefully. "She has a craze for detective stories, and while I never allow any such reading around here, she picks them up somewhere. How perfectly absurd that she should plan to be a lady detective?" again Zita smiled. "She confided her ambition to me the other night, and said she would even like all her lessons and social training better if she could read all the detective stories she wanted to read. You see, she is not quite old enough to appreciate the beauty in simple stories of girlhood, and she thinks the mystery tales are truly fascinating."

"But that will pass over," declared Mrs. Glennon hopefully. "Some girls have to have one kind and some another, but all kinds are harmless and pass over quickly. I hope my young Nellie-carpenter doesn't take to building

a stage on a table or a box on the fire escape. She's just crazy about doing things that she imagines her father used to do. Isn't it queer?"

"Yes; Cleo says Nellie made a great hit with the people in the play," Zita remarked in a complimentary tone.

"Wasn't that great?" The mother's eyes kindled brightly. "I haven't let-on but I know she does do pretty well in the school plays—the little midget."

"Of course, you know best, Rose. You are a real mother. But it does seem to me this whim of Cleo's is apt to lead her into mischief. There's no telling what she might undertake in playing detective."

"Nothing very foolish, not with the wise little head on her. Does she know the whole story?"

"Oh, no." Zita replied quickly. "I wouldn't risk that. Besides, Sylvia is so afraid she will grow up too soon, you know. She has an idea a grown girl would make her seem old."

"She's a foolish woman," scoffed Mrs. Glennon. "I tell you, Zita, if it wasn't for you the child might be spoiled and unhappy. She would fight Sylvia at every turn. But don't you worry. Cleo has a first-rate mother in Zita Brady," complimented Rose Glennon.

But Zita was not convinced. She knew her charge better than another could know her, and she dreaded to think of the trouble Cleo's innocent trustfulness and thirst for adventure might lead her into, and of the difficulty she, Zita, would now have watching her.

"There are so many things to be considered," she picked up the thread again after a little pause. "Since Sylvia has been away I have been told by one of the girls who came home with the children the other day, that it is positively against the rules to allow a child of Cleo's age to come and go about without a woman with her. When her aunt left she thought she had secured a friend to look after Cleo at these fancy classes and social affairs, but you know how quickly friends forget such tasks," murmured Zita.

"And that's worrying you?"

"Yes, how can I leave here for so long a time, and whom can I get, interested and trustworthy, to undertake even the other care," Zita asked vaguely.

"Why don't you go with her yourself? You're the one. The other—matter could be much easier handled than this. And I agree with that trainer. Children should not be allowed to come and go alone about this city without a grown

person alongside of them every single minute." She was recalling Nellie's story of the great afternoon she had spent at the rehearsal.

"But Rose, how could *I* go——"

"And why not?"

"Putting aside my own reason, there is also that promise——"

"Foolish, silly foolishness!" interrupted Rose, stammering in her haste. "Why should your promise bring trouble upon a child like Cleo?"

"Oh, you know I would do anything in the world for Cleo——"

"Then do it," followed up the dictator. "Just you lay aside all that foolishness, get some one to take your place in the other matter and then *that* will be *that*, anyhow," concluded Mrs. Glennon judiciously.

The other shook her head. "You don't know how hard it would be. But you do know that Sylvia doesn't want me to be seen in public with Cleo."

"That's a queer notion. What's the matter with you being seen with the child? And if she doesn't like it then why doesn't she stay here and take care of her herself? Who's with her at the silly little dinner party tonight?" demanded Mrs. Glennon.

"The young lady I spoke of, Molly Mason. She is in the gym with Cleo, and like so many others she seems very fond of her. I telephoned Mr. Bender, the dancing man, you know, and he assured me she was a very fine young woman," replied Zita. "We are so well known here now, though, this extra prudence seems rather uncalled for," commented Zita.

"But there's so many busybodies around these days," explained Mrs. Glennon, "and they're mostly women with nothing else to do. I've always thought that an orphan is everybody's business, but I tell you, an orphan with a lot of money is a surer target still. This pitying and inspecting, and taking notes and making records. It makes me sick. I don't wonder there's no more plays with children in them," declared Mrs. Rose Glennon irritably.

"Oh, but it is important, Rose. Why should young children be deprived of their birthrights? They must be looked after very carefully. And little girls like Cleo are sure to be spoiled either by expecting too much of the world or the world expecting too much of them. Just look at her ambition. To form a detective bureau for recreation. Imagine that!"

"Isn't it rich?" Mrs. Glennon rocked in

rhythm to her laughter. "And she told me the other day she had her net spread all over the city." Another burst of unspoiled laughter. "What harm is it to let her amuse herself? She won't do anything wrong—you can trust her for that," reiterated the friend of romantic girls, quite as if she knew exactly what she was talking about.

"I can trust her, yes. But she might—do something unwise. I wish that boy Shammy had not so much influence with her," Zita said next, very seriously. She could not easily dismiss her anxiety.

"I think it is the other way 'round. Sham is Cleo's slave, Nellie says; and it seems to me that's the likely how of it. There's that little Timmie that lives near me," diverted the narrator. "He would do anything for us, and he does; but as for walking to the corner with the little boy, Nellie wouldn't dream of doing it. They're babies in one way but they can't stand teasing, and some children are not so childish or maybe they're born pests, I don't know," concluded Mrs. Glennon lamely; "but they can tease terribly."

"Did you ever hear of a woman around the big

office buildings named Malanaphy?" asked Zita, referring to the mother of Shammy.

"Around the hotels? Why she's the one that kept the boarding house on Thirty-third. Of course, I remember her," replied Mrs. Glennon promptly.

"This is her little son, then, whom Cleo does all the talking about. I met him the day we took the walk to the ferry," went on Zita. "Rose, you know I told you I met an old friend that day, Constance Force. It was she who was bringing her little boy to the hospital."

"Yes, I remember you told me——" replied Rose.

"I heard the other day the little fellow is improving."

"Look at that now! And you thought he was going to die. I tell you, Zita Brady, you're very foolish. There's no call for you to make a martyr of yourself like this. And what account is it all?"

"Rose, you know I'll never leave *her*."

"And tell me, Zita, how is—your charge?" Mrs. Glennon asked very quickly.

"Sometimes she seems so very much better and her mind clears wonderfully. Do you know I be-

lieve she was following Cleo here that night they caught sight of her on the roof?"

"You don't say! How did she know——"

"Got hold of a paper with this address on and Cleo's name in that school play," sighed Zita. "And even her returning memory, her very strength, brings me more anxiety." Another heavy sigh showed how seriously all this was taken by the trusted maid.

"All important things do," said Rose sagely. "But you just wait a bit. I know signs when I see them, and I know she's getting better fast. If we could only ease her mind a little——"

"Yes, if we only could. Do you know, Rose, when Cleo suddenly told me she was going to find that lost child my heart stood still with hope. Foolish, I know, but there is no record of a death among the ten babies that the wealthy Miss Perry took in for shelter. Each was adopted by investigated foster-parents, but two, it seems, were taken abroad. And then the society's follow-up work had to cease for those two. One of these must have been—ours."

"Likely," agreed Rose, nodding her head sadly. "But why couldn't you convince Madeleine that some other child was the one? What harm if it soothed her?"

"It would be like robbing the mother heart," replied Zita, shaking her head sadly. "And besides, I believe she would know. Doctors tried it long ago and they could not soothe her that way. That little mark seems scarred on her brain."

"And the baby so young! It might have worn away?"

"No, it was too distinct. The baby really had a red mark on her instep; it looked like a heart, they said. Only an electric needle could ever have changed the peculiar mark, and it does not seem there would have been any need of that with the scar just on her foot.

"Well, I must be going, Zita, and I'm glad to have had this long talk," declared her friend. "I hope you'll get to see the bright side—go out with the girl, and let the change brush away the spider-webs from your mind. You know there's nothing so bad as sticking too close to a thing. It bends your mind in like a hat that hurts. Take my advice and have a look around."

"But I must keep close to my duty, Rose," Zita reminded her friend, with a satisfied little smile.

"Stickin' in a few flowers never hurt any picture, whether it's duty or pleasure," insisted the cheer agent rather confusedly. "The trouble is,

you've been makin' it all clouds. Now, I'll run along. Nellie's at a little party at the Mortons'. Mrs. Morton is the loveliest woman in the neighborhood. She has a big old-fashioned parlor, and once a month she invites all the youngsters in for a party. I wish I had room to do the same," sighed Mrs. Glennon. "I'll have the extra wash pieces back to you tomorrow," she digressed. "I kept them to darn a hole in one of the initialed towels; it was such a nice, fine piece of linen, I didn't want it to go any further."

"Rose, you are always so kind and thoughtful——"

"Why shouldn't I be? Haven't you always been the same to me?"

The telephone rang before the elevator started with the one lone passenger going down.

Every time the phone rang Zita received a little shock of dread. Something may have happened to Cleo, or it might be a call from the "sick friend." But again it was neither, and her fears were dispelled with a pleasant message from Margaret Carew—she was in town and coming to see them.

This was pleasant indeed. Margaret was a young woman to whom the city would offer the

lure of fascination, and Zita knew she would be the very one to chaperon Cleo until, perhaps, the aunt might return. To be relieved herself even for a time, from the task, brought a sense of genuine relief, for the philosophy of Mrs. Glennon that threw flowers on every canvas was not altogether tempting to one so long hidden in the shadows as Zita had been.

"And Cleo will love to have Margaret," she mused. "She is always so full of life and so vivid. I must plan brighter things for the child, to save her from her foolish love of things that are sensational," decided the worried one.

So Margaret was coming that very night, and Cleo was soon to experience the close companionship of a house visitor.

Would this affect her plans for the great detective work, that of searching for a baby left in a satin-padded basket on the steps of the Perry Mansion about twelve years ago?

Zita hoped, most ardently, it would. She feared for Cleo's safety in undertaking anything so absurd. And yet her own control of the girl was not that of a guardian. She had merely been hired by the Aunt Sylvia. It was her love for Cleo's mother, who had been Zita Brady's lifelong chum, that was doing more to keep her

watchfulness over Cleo than was that stated and regularly paid salary.

Up to the present time, however, her charge had been as tractable as most girls with personality are expected to be, but now——

“I am so glad that Margaret is coming,” Zita reflected again. “Surely her companionship will divert Cleo from her silly nonsense.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

BUT Cleo was not to be so easily diverted. The advent of Margaret delayed but did not entirely frustrate her plans. The visitor was a jolly, wholesome young girl, ready for everything the big city might offer in the way of a good time, and that she should have the wonderful experience of all the good times that were being thrust upon Cleo, and which the latter all but detested, was sure to mean a great deal to Margaret. Only a half year out of a girls' finishing school and to run right into this sort of thing! It seemed too good to be true.

"Mother was afraid you might be crowded in an apartment," she confessed, after ecstatically surveying the almost sumptuous quarters, "but I knew Cousin Sylvia better than that. And Zita," Margaret said again, "it is so wonderful to have you here with Cleo, Mother says——"

"Where else should I be?" interrupted Zita,

giving the newcomer a sweeping look. This imparted to Margaret the information that Cleo was still regarded as too young to bear the knowledge of unhappy conditions that were being hidden from her. When they were alone Zita explained more fully.

So Margaret entered into the spirit of the home drama with all the zest of rapturous youth, and Cleo found joy in being the central figure of the play. For some few days even Nellie was almost forgotten, and Shammy wondered if his "ideal" was only "putty" after all. There was the news from Tommy—he was "getting along fine," and his mother was writing notes to Zita, thus renewing their old friendship so curiously uncovered when Cleo and Shammy had showered their flowers upon the little boy in the big ambulance.

But Shammy was not now quite sure about the flower business. It was not so easy to get enough flowers. So serious did this question seem to the boy that he managed to make opportunity of putting it to Cleo. It was when she stood a minute waiting for her turn to practice a new dance, and her companion, Margaret, was sitting on one of the side benches out of hearing.

"Of course keep it up," ordered Cleo. "I'm

almost ready to do the biggest thing. Don't you know I have to win my friend's confidence?"

"Oh," said Shammy simply, but the syllable was a paragraph in inflection. It offered complete confidence so far as the freckle-faced boy was concerned.

"The biggest thing!" he repeated when Cleo went dancing down the long line the teacher was counting time for. "I suppose it'll be something bigger than ever. I wonder what?"

But girls and boys do not have to wonder long; their world always moves quickly.

Cleo would be at the school the very next afternoon and she knew this would be her chance. She was determined to undertake her detective work, although she realized at least some of the risks it might involve. Margaret might be persuaded to go shopping while Cleo was at class, then Cleo hoped to put into execution her cherished plan.

She consulted Shammy. "Is your mother sure the same officer is at that police station who was there when Miss Perry had the Home?" she asked him again. This referred to the lost baby and Miss Perry was the name of the benefactress who had, years ago, done so much for poor little children.

"Same man: Officer Tynan." Shammy was brief and positive.

"Is he kind?"

"Good to kids," the boy testified. "When they're lost he treats them fine. But this baby or girl couldn't be around now," he insisted doubtfully. He too thought rather lightly of Cleo's detective plan.

"I know that, Sham," she replied to his statement. "I just want to go over the ground—you know the way all detectives do." Cleo did not like Shammy's manner; but she would show him. Just wait.

Shammy smiled indulgently, but Cleo did not further divulge her *wonderful* plan.

Then Cleo undertook to divert Margaret. This required just a little deft management, but the visitor finally agreed to go on the shopping tour because Cleo insisted she needed a particular shade of new stockings that only Margaret, Cleo declared, would be able to select.

"You're a darling, Margy, to go away down town for me," gushed Cleo. "I'll do something nice for you some day," and she squeezed Margaret's arm rather violently.

"You're doing it for me now," replied Margaret. "But why so excited? Are you dancing

too hard? Your cheeks are ready to blow up." Her friend might have been a little suspicious of Cleo's manner, but how could she have guessed?

"Yes," sighed Cleo, making a dive for the little vanity case that lay waiting on a table. "I did dance rather hard." She dabbed at her cheeks.

"Well, I'll go," agreed Margaret. "But be careful while I'm gone."

Gladly Cleo agreed. But once alone she had to hurry.

She would have to disguise, of course; that had been settled long ago, and playing parts could mean nothing else to Cleo than playing them well. A girl detective must be ideal; she would, she determined, have to disguise as a boy!

And there would be no blundering or delays. The boy's suit had been purloined from the wardrobe-room days before, and it was now hidden behind a trunk in one of the dressing rooms.

Locking herself in, Cleo quickly slipped into the simple outfit. It was the one to be used in "Tatters" when Tatters would fall into prosperity, and it looked exactly like the outfit of any ordinary boy just "gone into long pants."

Cleo glanced at her silly little feet. They were too little; she would have to wear

the clumsy shoes; but that did not worry her.

The necktie was tied with elaborate carelessness, the coat buttoned over the striped blouse, and then the cap! It would hide her hair, what hair she had, the yellow ringlets. The ever ready invisible "net" suggested help in that direction, and she quickly caught the bobbed ringlets in its mesh. The big cap secured the whole, and the result in the glass was satisfactory. She felt like a brave and daring Girl Scout.

But did her face look too small? Was it too delicate for a boy? A few smudges of a darkish mixture from a small jar touched up her cheekbones into a rather boyish defiance. She rubbed a grease cloth over it all to hide the cause and leave only the desired effect.

Cleo had to work quickly, but she was well trained to do so. Once safely out into the street with the big hotel-school behind her, and she would be willing to take the adventure just as it chose to present itself.

Every one was busy when she poked her head out cautiously. She made straight for the door and was in the street so quickly that the shadow of the big buildings almost frightened her. The next minute her courage returned and she sauntered to the corner, boarded a surface car with

an agile swing, in spite of the big shoes, and dropped her coin in the box indifferently. A convenient newspaper lay beside her as she sank into a corner seat, and she gratefully got behind it.

Cleo felt the car filling up but had no interest in the passengers. Every street called out by the conductor brought her nearer that station—she had made sure of its exact locality, and now there could only be a few blocks more. She folded the paper and glanced around. Every one was personally occupied and seemed unconscious of every one else. They just travelled in the cars as if they were asleep, or as if they depended upon the car to drop each one of them off at exactly the right corner without any help from them. But she was not so sure of herself; she must watch every corner for her stop.

But now there was something to win in all this; something real to try for. Never for a moment did she doubt that she was right. She had come to believe that the only way to be sure that an important thing was done was to do it; and likewise her charity-play acting had influenced her to believe that acting was no crime. One thing, however, she did know. She had never heard that the laws oppose girls wearing boys' attire.

That no girl should ever do that under any circumstances. It is against the law!

She reached the junction—the corner where the two lines of tracks interlaced. This was where the police station was situated, the one she was bound for. With a secret little sigh of relief she left the car. Crowds were threading in and out in endless confusion yet no one seemed confused but Cleo. No one noticed her except the traffic officer, and he piloted her across the busy thoroughfare expertly. He was kind even to small boys. Upon landing she glanced around and had no trouble in locating the red brick building.

That was it—the Madison Police Station.

Cautiously now Cleo faced her task. She reviewed her lines again and realized their weakness. After all, written parts were much more intelligent, she decided. And she hoped she wouldn't weaken.

Would the officers be kind? Suppose Captain Tynan wasn't on duty? Shammy might be mistaken about his hours, for the boy had no idea what his information meant to Cleo. He would have known better than to let his little friend undertake such a thing.

The "boy" made straight for the station. She wondered how she looked now, no vanity case in

these clothes. And would her voice sound boyish? Cleo left no detail to chance; she knew Shammy's voice was as high pitched as a girl's and she knew how to direct her own in a similar key. She had even practiced it last night and it sounded pretty good to her.

Some one was passing up the stone steps; that was her cue and she followed it. In through the corridor, with its big door-mat half a room size, then farther in to another door that was opened, she bravely made her way.

A uniformed man sat behind a bright brass rail. He was studying a big book, and did not raise his eyes as she timidly faced him.

She stood for a moment watching the officer. He had not glanced up but probably would presently. Cleo could "feel him think," she imagined, and hoped he would not be too critical when he should look at her.

Finally the officer coughed and Cleo jerked nervously. Then he glanced up indifferently; pushed his cap back to free a gray forelock, and spoke evenly:

"Well kid! What's yours?"

"I came to ask you—are you Officer Tynan?"

"I am."

"Then maybe you remember the Perry Home

where they used to take in strange babies?"

"Huh? Maybe I do." The officer pulled his cap in place again. Cleo sidled up to the rail and leaned upon it at the end—it was a little shaded there by a curve toward another office.

"I know it's queer, inquiren' now," (Cleo clipped her words boyishly, she hoped) "but I just heard you might know somethin' an' my folks have been huntin' for a baby left there about twelve years ago. Would there be any way of tracin, it, officer?" she asked, sighing for more things than one.

"Well, now, let me see. Who'd you say you were?"

"It's my aunt that's lookin' for the lost baby. The baby's name was pinned on her arm, her coat or somethin'. It was Nannie Kimball," Cleo said, evading the officer's direct question.

"Kimball? And what's your name?"

"Charlie Carroll," replied Cleo, actually assuming the name of the character her outfit belonged to. Why shouldn't she? She was playing Charlie Carroll, wasn't she? She was being Tatters now.

"Now Charles, this is a bit odd," spoke Officer Tynan. "What makes you so keen on the trail just now?" Cleo felt the sweep of his eyes under

the bushy brows, and shifted with true "business" for the part.

"Why, I always said I'd take up the hunt when I got big enough," she went on bravely, "and I just heard about you."

"That's first rate. I must be gettin' popular. How'd you hear?"

"From Shamus Malanaphy."

"Friend Shammy, eh? And what does he know about the old Perry Place?" Business of settling back comfortably and tapping pencil on a big book. Cleo had not expected anything so critical.

"Shammy's mother used to work around such places, and the baby belonged to a—friend of hers."

"Hum! Guess that's right, kid. I heard something like that before. And so you're buttin' in on the Lost Persons Squad?" He almost laughed, and Cleo wondered did officers ever laugh at worried boys. She would hate him to laugh at her now. It would "throw her off" just as surely as if she had missed her part in the play.

"Why didn't Shammy come around with you?" questioned the officer next. How his eyes stung her face!

"Oh, he's busy at the hotel. They have a lot of stylish classes there now," faltered Tatters.

"Yes, that's right too. Come over this way, kid, and sit down. Then we can talk it out quietly."

Another officer popped his head up from a desk. Cleo had not seen him before. She shuffled over to a chair indicated by the captain and flopped into it just as Shammy always flopped into the big chair at class when he wasn't being wanted anywhere.

This was the critical moment. The officer was surely giving her the "once over." She tried not to think of him, but just to think of the big detective scheme.

And he took his time about everything. Why didn't he go on with his questions or answer the one she had taken all these chances to ask?

"And so you're Charlie Carroll?" he said at length. "Where'd you say you lived?"

"At 501 Brandt Street," Cleo answered this time by assuming Nellie's home number. She knew she could explain that subterfuge.

He wrote it down and sort of nodded. Charlie Carroll could live in a house like Nellie Glennon's perhaps he was thinking.

"And just what was it you wanted to know?" His eyes were boring holes in hers now.

"If you could tell me how to hunt for a baby that was left in the blue-satin basket twelve years ago?" she managed to ask. The clock was frightening Cleo now more than the policeman. She must hurry. She would be missed!

"That's right: it was a blue satin-lined basket," agreed Officer Tynan. "And they did make quite a time about it. Your cousin, you said, got dropped in by mistake?"

"Yes's'r."

"Mother livin'?"

"Yes! s'r." (Maybe, thought Cleo.)

"Got rich and wants the kid again, just like in the movies?" Was he sneering now?

"No sir. She's awful sick from worryin' about it," defended Cleo promptly.

"Happens that way too. Well, just wait a minute, and we'll see what we can do for you." He pressed a button and a woman—of all things, a woman—stepped in beside him from a small door back of the rail!

And now Cleo knew she was "in for it."

CHAPTER XIV

A LOST CAUSE

THE captain spoke in an undertone to the matron. Then she sauntered over to Cleo.

"Just step this way," she ordered in a level voice. It betrayed neither kindness nor force.

Cleo looked at the captain but he failed to notice her mute appeal. She followed the matron.

"Now, dear," said the woman quickly as the door of another room closed behind them, "you're a little girl, aren't you?"

"Ye-s," stammered Cleo, amazed.

"Have you run away?"

"Oh no!"

"Then why did you disguise?"

"I couldn't come if I didn't." New terrors were unfolding. Would she be locked up?

"Then you did run away?" The microscopic eyes were prying at Cleo's secret.

"No ma'am; I really didn't. I just disguised so I could get here."

"Well, sit down, child, and we'll talk it over." She motioned to a wooden chair. It was highly polished but made entirely of wood. Cleo dropped into it gratefully. "What's your right name?"

"Cleo," murmured the truant.

"Cleo what?"

"Cleo Kimball." She felt just as she did when signing her accident insurance policy.

"And where do you live?"

The apartment address was given this time, but evidently made no special impression on the police-matron, who seemed to be writing all this down automatically.

"Parents living?"

"No." Cleo could be exact in answer to such precise questions.

"Who takes care of you? Who is your guardian?" This double question did take the eyes of the matron from her notes.

"Miss Zita Brady—my aunt——" said Cleo. Why should she mention her real aunt. Aunt Sylvia, the woman who merely cashed her checks? And if Zita wasn't really an aunt—Cleo always felt sure she ought to be.

"Your father living?"

"No."

The eyes of the woman went over Cleo's head.

"Do you go to school?"

"I have tutors."

"Got a permit?"

"Yes."

"What district?"

"Twelfth."

"How old are you?"

"Fourteen."

"You're made up neat enough to be used to it."

The matron smiled a little, then she laid aside her notebook. "But it's best now to make a clean breast of it, and tell me the whole story. You needn't be afraid."

"But I *did* tell the officer the story," insisted Cleo, becoming more frightened every minute. Margaret Carew would be sending out an alarm for her if she couldn't soon get away. Then she would be in real trouble.

"You came to inquire about a lost baby?"

Cleo sighed. How could she go all over it again. "Really, Mrs. Officer," she faltered, "I left a class to get here, and they will all be so frightened. Can't I telephone?"

"I'll phone for you. Whom shall I call?"

Cleo gave her the number and told her to ask for Shammy Malanaphy. There was no longer any possibility of pretense.

"Shammy, eh? Couldn't I call some woman who knows you?"

For a minute Cleo resented the inference. Did she doubt Shammy's honesty? "The young lady who was with me is a stranger in the city," Cleo finally faltered, "but no doubt she will be there and anxious," said the culprit. "You could ask for Miss Margaret Carew. The phone number is 1001 Beverly." Charlie Carroll's dialect was now rudely discarded. It was much easier to use the girl-type of English.

"All right, I'll try it," agreed the matron picking up her phone.

Even this was a relief. Cleo had never intended to "disappear," and she feared now for what her adventure would mean to Zita and the others.

"Yes," came the matron's voice. And again "Yes." This is the Madison Police Station, Mrs. Goodwin talking. We have a child who says she is Cleo Kimball."

A long pause with business of facial twists from the matron.

"So she says; she's wearing boy's clothes." A

sidelong glance at Cleo to verify this statement.

"Is it Margaret?" broke in Cleo impatiently, but the matron was glued to the phone.

"You'll have to come to identify her."

"Oh, please, tell her to fetch Shammy," implored Cleo, now looking to the boy as a criminal might look to counsel.

"You're pretty wise," condescended Mrs. Goodwin in an aside. Then into the phone, "You might fetch the Malanaphy boy along. It will help to identify her."

Charlie Carroll was dissolving almost into tears. Wasn't this too mean? To be suspected, when only the noblest of motives actuated her. Now Zita might never trust her again, and she hadn't found out a single thing after all. Was it so impossible for a girl to be a detective?

"Oh, she'll be all right here with me," murmured the matron's voice again. Then, "There's no danger of that." This was snappy—resentful.

"Could I say a word?" begged Cleo suddenly.

"Why yes," the phone was handed over.

Then Cleo spoke into it. "I'm all right, Margaret. Just came down here to find something out. . . . No, I'm not a bit frightened and don't you be. Better bring Shammy along,

to make sure. He knows the city." A weak little laugh finished this. "No, don't worry. I'll just look around till you come. Mrs. Goodwin is very kind."

She handed the phone back to the matron, who spoke again.

"Miss Carew?" Pause. "Yes, she's perfectly all right and none the worse for it. Bring along her own clothes; she must change here."

"Oh please, Mrs. Goodwin, ask her to bring my pumps. They are on the trunk right at my dressing-room door." Cleo implored this.

"And fetch her slippers, please. They're on the trunk in her room," repeated the lips at the phone. Again the matron listened, and again she spoke:

"Oh, this is a private room, she's not in the police court at all." Mrs. Goodwin was about to drop the receiver on the hook. Her whole manner indicated impatience. Why didn't the people know how police business is run!

Cleo faced her inquisitor now, and felt Mrs. Goodwin was not really convinced. Either that or she had small regard for the noble cause.

"May I have a drink of water, please?" Cleo asked. She realized now that Charlie Carroll was a rather difficult part to play.

"There's the cooler," replied the matron, pointing indifferently to the inverted glass tank.

Cleo took two drinks from the little paper cup.

There seemed no need for further conversation. How queer that the woman didn't say any more. Even the captain had been more friendly. Mrs. Goodwin was again making a record.

"What time did you leave the hotel?" came the question.

"About four, I think," faltered Cleo.

"And you say you wanted to find out about a baby?"

"Yes, that is, it was a baby about twelve or thirteen years ago." There was just a touch of asperity in Cleo's tone. It did seem police people were rather stupid asking the same question so often.

"And you really thought you could find that baby?" It was the other's turn to scoff.

"No, not at once. But I knew that children in this city who become public children are not very easily lost track of. You keep whole libraries of records. Shammy says so."

The woman smiled humanly. "That's right, we do," she admitted. "But they get in so deep we can't always dig them out. Like taking root, you know."

Perhaps the woman was going to be friendly after all.

"Don't you think I ever could trace her?" continued Cleo. She repeated what she knew of the lady with the blue-satin baby basket.

Mrs. Goodwin was thoughtful for a moment.

"I just recall that the Personality House sent in a record lately, and the name Perry Mansion was used in it. They keep girls up to sixteen at this house and there is a Baby Shelter connected with it," said the matron.

"Oh, do tell me about that, please," begged Cleo. "You think they may have a girl there who was once in the Perry Home?"

"They may have, but again it may only be a link in the records."

"But please do give me the address."

"You couldn't miss it, the Personality House, it's in the phone book. But, dear child," seeing Cleo's hopeful manner, "don't expect too much. A lost baby is likely to stay lost in spite of our great system of records." The matron arose to answer a tap at the door. Opening it, a man's voice said in an undertone:

"Captain says you have a good story, Mrs. Goodwin?"

A reporter! guessed Cleo.

"You have to get it from him then," replied the matron pleasantly.

"He says this youngster claims to be Cleo Kimball, the young society girl."

"That's a captain's privilege."

Cleo was grateful and she sank deeper into Charlie Carroll's shoes. Her back was to the door of inquisition.

"Oh, come now. Give a fellow a story on an off day," the young man cajoled.

This was too much for Cleo. She had to speak.

"There isn't any story," she said pertly. "This is a private affair."

"Hel-lo! Looks like the real thing!" drawled the newspaper fellow. "Can't I step in, Mrs. Goodwin?"

"You can't." A laugh flickered through.

"And are you Miss——"

"Please go away. This isn't a—a story. No one knows I'm here and I don't want them to," blundered the girl, who thought she knew something even about newspaper tactics! She didn't, of course, not about the kind that serves the public; society work is very different from that.

But the scribe was losing no time. He had

"spotted" the youngster, and what it was impossible really to inspect of this youngster's appearance he could very glibly guess at.

"A mighty good yarn," he commented. "And Mrs. Goodwin—I can't imagine you treating me this way," the reporter joked, evidently killing time.

"Jimmie," said the matron, while Cleo was getting deeper in her borrowed shoes and was also trying to burrow deeper into the borrowed cap. The matron was talking at the man, not to him. She said again:

"Jimmie, you better wait. We're not here to advertise the society folks." This was mumbled discreetly.

Cleo's face burned under Charlie Carroll's make-up.

"Please, Mrs. Goodwin," she spoke up, defying a possible cell somewhere, "I wouldn't for the world have my name published in this way. It would be perfectly dreadful. If my Aunt Sylvia ever heard of it——" She was just aiming an eye peek at the door.

The reporter took a note, surreptitiously. He jabbed the paper back in his pocket.

"Very well, Auntie Goodwin," he said to the matron. "If you won't give up, I'll have to wait,

but you sure are a hard-hearted lady," he insisted smiling broadly.

Mrs. Goodwin made sure the door clicked to safety.

"They ought to be coming," sighed Cleo. There was another big clock in this room.

"Don't be nervous, child," said the matron much more kindly. "Cars are crowded at this hour."

"I suppose so," said Cleo, "but I got here very quickly. And Margaret would take a taxi."

Mrs. Goodwin looked up suddenly and smiled.

"The newspaper man thought he was going to have a fine story; didn't he?" she remarked, smiling.

Another tap at the door: Cleo started. Yes! It was Margaret!

"Cleo darling!" gasped the girl entering. Margaret was plainly excited. She reached Cleo before Mrs. Goodwin could say a word. "We have been frightened to death," she exclaimed next, then she discovered the boy's "get up," and stopped to stare.

"I'm all right, Margaret, and so sorry you have been worried," Cleo said, now strangely composed. She looked knowingly at Margaret's suitcase. Also, she had seen Shammy, just out-

side the door, hand it over to Margaret as Mrs. Goodwin answered the knock. Of course a boy couldn't come in this particular room. "This is my friend Miss Carew, Mrs. Goodwin," said Cleo, standing. "It was from her I escaped."

"Yes indeed," added Margaret acknowledging the matron's slight bow. "I'm afraid I'm not a very trustworthy chaperon."

"I'll just go over the record, if you please," said Mrs. Goodwin. "Then, if it's all right, she can slip into her own togs and run along."

Margaret seemed too much relieved to do more than glare at Cleo. She had experienced a pretty bad hour while her charge was missing, and felt keenly the fault was hers. Why had she ever left the child alone? she asked remorsefully, even now.

But here she was again, safe and sound, but in those funny clothes. Boy's clothes! She must get her out of that rig quickly, decided Margaret.

"Can she change now?" she asked the matron anxiously.

"Yes, here's a little place back of this screen. You can help her here," replied Mrs. Goodwin, turning back one fold of a panelled screen that stood near a darkened window.

When Cleo emerged she wore her own street suit—the gray coat with squirrel trimmings, and the small gray squirrel cap. She left behind in the suitcase all that she had borrowed of Charlie Carroll's, and after a few further details the matron brought her out to Captain Tynan.

He was talking to Shammy very pleasantly. As Cleo and Margaret faced them he smiled broadly.

"Well now, that's better," he said heartily. "Had quite a time, didn't you?"

"Quite an experience," chirped in Margaret. "I was simply scared to death."

Shammy took the suitcase, and gave a broad grin to Cleo—the kind that wrinkled his biggest freckles. Mrs. Goodwin stood by authoritatively.

Presently Margaret slipped over to the desk to ask if she might use the phone.

"Please just say we have been delayed," suggested Cleo, surmising the call was for Zita.

"I haven't told her——" Margaret hinted.

"I am so glad. Margaret, you are a very good chaperon after all," whispered Cleo.

"And say," said Captain Tynan in that awkward way some men fall into when addressing strange young women, "if I should find out any-

thing you want to know I'll send word to you," he said finally in a lovely kind voice to Cleo.

Cleo favored him with a glance that excluded Margaret's confidence.

"Oh, thank you," she said gratefully. "Of course," she didn't let Margaret hear this—"I've got to find out."

"Of course," agreed Captain Tynan, shifting his cap as he smiled. Even Mrs. Goodwin was smiling condescendingly. And when Shammy led the way with the suitcase, that insistent newspaper man actually bobbed up from somewhere and fluttered his yellow copy paper to fold it for his pocket.

Cleo almost gasped. "Please don't tell him—any more," she begged quickly.

"No sir-ree! This is a private property," declared Captain Tynan. But the scribe smiled and raised his soft hat as the trio started off.

CHAPTER XV

THE BEST OF GOOD NEWS

It had to happen: it always does. The excitement proved too much for Cleo and instead of going around town with Margaret, as she expected to do, she was kept in bed by her doctor's orders.

The doctor insisted she had been doing too much and going too much. Then he took occasion to express his personal views of children taking part in plays, and all that. Dr. Bradner was a man of broad experience among children and he knew perfectly well what too much excitement can do to a girl of Cleo's type.

But Cleo was not very ill—simply a little overdone, and perhaps, after all, it was that fancy dancing and not entirely the "police lark" that was directly responsible for her disordered nerves.

Margaret played nurse very successfully. She loved to arrange pretty trays and to take care of

the flowers. It seemed Cleo was always to have plenty of flowers, for, after all, it is much easier for her girl friends to phone the florist than to write letters or even notes.

It must be admitted Cleo was having a lovely time being sick, and she was literally enjoying her poor health immensely. No classes, no dress-makers, no manicuring, no hair fussing and above all no worrying! This was a vacation de luxe.

And she revelled in it. The doctor had ordered absolute rest, as he had to order something, and medicines are not "indicated" in such health as Cleo claimed. Her "turn" of hysteria was nothing more than the escaping of pent-up nerve force. She heard the doctor say that, and she was able to understand its meaning because the action had been tried out on her, personally.

Now when Margaret left the room the sick girl would spring to her desk and get a notebook, or she would grab from her dresser the little bag of silver and count it all over again, or she would get a forbidden book (she was to rest her eyes), place it somewhere within reach and read it every time she got the chance. Logically sweets were forbidden, they always were, but there was that tin box of everlasting candies, she

found it under her ribbon case, and she placed it indifferently on a side table within reach. She might just fancy one or two.

So it was joyous to be sick that way, and Cleo made the most of it. She insisted that Nellie come at least every second day, and these visits were the climax of many lazy hours. Zita, however, seemed troubled and she continuously thanked the conditions that had thrown Margaret Carew in their path at this "critical" period. Margaret seemed to fit in beautifully, and if Zita really knew what happened when Cleo essayed to play Charlie Carroll in public she gave no sign.

At the end of six days the patient was allowed to sit up, and Margaret's amateur vigilance was relaxed. Then Shammy came to see her. And the budget of news he carried with him! Every one was asking for Cleo, of course. Yes, Presto was going to come, she asked Shammy how to get to the apartment. This was welcome news indeed, for one of the secret benefits of Cleo's "breakdown" was, it seemed, that it had brought her many things long and ardently desired. For instance, she might now really have a chance to talk privately with Presto.

One day Shammy was sitting in the plainest

chair he could pick out in that over-stuffed apartment. It had tied-on cushions at that, but the arms were latticed and he could count the holes as he talked, or as Cleo talked to him.

"When is she coming, Shammy?" asked the girl in the Japanese silk things, referring to Presto.

"She didn't say, but soon, I'm sure." Shammy was always so obliging, he made it "soon."

"If you could bring her, Sham, or if Nellie could call for her. I'd love to have her come before I get entirely well," said Cleo luxuriously.

"Oh, she'll come. I think she's helping some other girl——"

"I guess she has to work; but she's a perfectly fine girl," Cleo insisted. "I'd like to have her chance to do as I please." She pouted a little but was soon talking about Nellie.

"Oh, didn't you hear?" Shammy asked. "Nellie is going to have her voice tried." Shammy seemed to be chewing his freckles. He had been warned not to talk too much to the supposed patient.

"Oh, really, Sham?" Marked excitement. "I'm so glad! Do tell me about it!"

An uncertain finger went to his lip, and he shook his head. Cleo knew what he meant.

Some one might overhear and it was a secret about Nellie's voice. Then Cleo raised her own voice musically to talk of the flower sales. They were very satisfactory, the boy reported, and Rosa, the Italian woman down at the ferry, was willing and anxious to take them all, but another stand near a big hospital offered better prices, so he had scattered the trade. All this served to cover the remarks about Nellie's singing, for she had warned the boy not to tell.

"And Tommy; how is Tommy?" asked Cleo next.

"Gettin' along fine. I heard them say the big loft by the river did the business—I mean cured him with fresh air. You know his mother sent you a note; you got it, didn't you?" asked the boy.

"Thanks for the flowers? Oh yes, I got that," answered Cleo, ignorant of the other note that brought news to Zita. She continued:

"You know, Sham, Tommy must belong to our detective club. He could ask all the folks in that big hospital about the lost baby."

"Oh yes." Shammy didn't want to laugh, but he almost did when he remembered Cleo in that police station.

"And so many children on our detective staff

will surely bring results," Cleo went on in a businesslike way. She seemed to be chuckling a little herself.

"Oh yes." Shammy was sure that answer would do for any of Cleo's questions.

"About how much money have we now, exactly?" Cleo almost whispered. How could they run a detective bureau without money?

"About," repeated Shammy, "exactly thirty-eight dollars."

"Oh really! Isn't that magnificent?"

"Yes, it is. I have it in the hotel safe and I had to explain to Mr. Bender all about it," he said with a touch of defiance.

"Of course they would wonder where you could get all that money," agreed Cleo. "But you had our account book to show, didn't you, Sham?"

"You bet, and I was glad you made notes in it," declared the boy, counting the holes in the chair with his unmanageable fingers. "Bender knew your writin', and when he asked me if your folks cared, he just answered himself by sayin' he guessed the flowers were yours and you had a right to do as you pleased with them. Oh, Bender's all right," and Shammy stood up from the

rattan seat as Margaret entered with the ordered tray of nourishment.

"I must be goin'," he faltered, as Margaret entered.

"Oh, it's early," Cleo parried. But the boy was moving. "Now, be sure to tell Presto I'm just waiting to have her come especially. And tell Nellie, if you should see her, that I'm expecting her tomorrow and I'm going to be out soon. She'll know. Then, Shammy," continuing the schedule of orders, "will you please remind Mabel to put back my slipper case if she's finished with it? She had such a precious new pair she begged my case for them. Hazel Bond has a habit of trying on Mabel's, it seems. Now be careful of the flowers." Margaret was balancing the tray, but Cleo persisted, "You ought to get a lot for those beauties, but you will have to get rid of them quickly, they fade so soon, you know," she warned him.

"Yes, I know," confessed Shammy, and he had good reason to understand the frailty of roses. "Good-bye, I'm glad you're—all right, and I'll tell everybody everythin'," he volunteered. But Margaret wondered how he would remember everything, there had been so many items in Cleo's orders.

Usually Shammy was not awkward, and he felt no hesitancy in the presence of people, but that apartment—that was different, and did upset him a little. Yet, he moved off in good call-boy fashion, and Cleo watched him proudly.

Zita had his flowers all ready for him and, truth to tell, she was secretly admitting that this was a rather practical way to dispose of the luxuries. But the secret motive for their re-sale she left, wisely, to the girl who had originated the plan. This was harmless; perhaps just some other little charity scheme of Cleo's, she decided.

When Shammy was gone Zita came in the living room and inspected the patient. Patient! Even Zita smiled at the idea.

And Cleo laughed merrily, declaring it was all a good joke and she never had so much fun in all her life.

"What will Aunt Sylvia say?" she demanded. She meant about the illness.

The companion merely shifted her expression in answer to Cleo's question. Then she asked: "You are sure you're all right, dear? No headache nor any nerve throbbing?"

"Oh that. All nonsense, Zita. I just had that once—like a brain storm, you know. Hasn't Aunt Sylvia written lately?" Cleo asked hesi-

tantly, but hoped the aunt would not have heard anything about the police station episode.

"Yes, she wrote—that is I received a letter today," answered Zita.

"Now you're holding something back. Tell me instantly, Zita-Wita, what is the news?" Bolt upright sat the Cleo-patrician.

"Don't get excited, dear——"

"I shall if you don't tell me the news," the girl threatened. The blue satin "mules" would surely fly off in a minute if those little feet didn't stop pattering their tattoo.

"If you will promise——"

"Anything and everything for the news. Is she married?"

"Yes."

"I knew it and I told you so, but you wouldn't believe me! Oh, isn't it glorious! Will she go away on a long honeymoon?" Flagrant hope!

"Yes," again from Zita. "She is going abroad directly. The doctor says——"

"That doctor is an angel. He must be my own guardian off on leave and he has picked up this case—Aunt Sylvia's I mean. And now, Zita, she will be rich, won't she?"

"Major Bradley is quite wealthy." These measured replies meant more than their words.

Cleo sensed this so she raced on triumphantly.

"Then perhaps, I can see my own checks at last. Zita, did she—make any arrangements?"

"Can't you be content with all this news for a little while, dear? Suppose your head starts again?"

"It surely will if I leave it gasping for details. I must know all and, Zita, I can see by your eyes there's a lot more. And I know it's all good. Oh, Zita-Wita Brady! You wouldn't keep me waiting?"

The blue eyes now were entreating seriously. Zita smiled into them. But she was afraid to say the words that actually trembled on her lips.

"Please! Please, Zita!" The chaise-longue was disregarded now and Cleo sprang into the lap of her devoted Zita.

"She has turned your full guardianship over to me. I was to be appointed in case she married," said Zita finally.

Deep down into the love nest Cleo dropped her head. Zita's arms went close around the little Japanese robe, and she dropped her own head down to brush the cobwebby cap on Cleo's yellow ringlets.

Margaret, reading over in the corner, wanted to turn a page but she waited.

"My own darling at last!" whispered Zita, and the girl in her arms seemed only the baby she had been when tragic circumstances brought her to Zita those years before.

All the companion's devotion was compensated for in this full, happy hour.

Now, perhaps some of the clouds Nellie's mother objected to might roll away from Zita's crowded canvas.

Cleo was too happy to move.

CHAPTER XVI

AUNT SYLVIA'S RETREAT

AT last! At last!

Cleo would no longer have to wonder what Aunt Sylvia would say to this or that, and Zita, her own mother's best friend, would now know exactly what was right.

"And I can soon get out of all this dressed-up business and fussing," the rebel was telling herself, for in the two or three years she had been in the big city her Aunt Sylvia did nothing else, it seemed, but "pile things on." Detestable things, so artificial that even a girl as young as Cleo could not help but despise the artifice. For what? To make Aunt Sylvia's name known in social circles? Using the attractive girl as a social ladder to climb up on? It was sometimes done, but never successfully.

Cleo must have guessed that her aunt had been disappointed in the foolish attempt, and her resentment at being made a tool of—if not a fool

of—was keen even now, when the good news had just arrived.

But she did so love Zita. And that Zita should no longer be treated as a paid companion was a matter of real joy to Cleo. That and the new possibilities the changed relationship might afford. Perhaps now, thought Cleo, she would have a chance to try some real detective work.

But Cleo did not long rest in the new-found security. Presently she again demanded to know all about it. Zita hesitated, but Margaret came to the rescue.

"It will do her good; tell her," she suggested. "I don't believe I ever heard of a marriage so completely splendid." The pause made apology for the sweeping statement.

"Margie, you're a love, and I choose you for my assistant guardie," spoke Cleo, still begging to be told all about it. "And I'm not the least bit sick. That doctor was engaged by Aunt Sylvia, remember that, Zita. Now we may find a new one with more sense and less—self-esteem. Go on, dear, tell us all about the marriage of—Mrs. Major Bradley. Be sure to remember the major part. Aunt Sylvia would insist upon that."

Zita left the room and returned with a sheet of yellow paper—a night letter that had brought

the great news over the wires from the South.

"Now, be good and I'll read," she promised. Zita had not escaped the infection of relief so conspicuously prevalent. Even Margaret had the symptoms.

Cleo settled down in her chair and Margaret curled up on the divan. Sensation was rampant; it seemed to be sissing in the very air.

At last Zita began. She read from the yellow paper:

"I was married this morning to Major Bradley and am leaving at once for a trip abroad."

"Ta-ta! Bye-bye! So long!" sang out Cleo, but Margaret checked her.

"The doctor ordered me to take an ocean voyage and so I have consented." Zita paused and the smile on her lips paused also.

Cleo gurgled foolishly and Margaret joined in. They were both girls and both were having a lovely time.

Zita pretended to dislike the interruption but presently continued: "It becomes necessary for me to relinquish the guardianship of darling Cleo so I have wired my attorneys to turn over all power to you, Zita Brady, according to the original plans." These last lines were uttered in an

entirely different tone and with a sigh the message was finished.

Cleo too looked serious and wistful now. She no longer laughed. "Is that all?" she asked very quietly.

"Just a note more," said Zita as she read again: "You will find all instructions in the papers. I hope she is well, and I know you will make her happy. I am very happy but sorry to leave without your love. I cannot thank you enough for your devotion to Cleo." Zita stopped and swallowed hard. Her eyes were swimming.

"Is that all?" again asked Cleo gravely.

"Just the directions for me to follow in the legal matters," replied Zita folding up the paper, "and she says she will write from the steamer."

"Major—Uncle Major paid for that letter, I'm sure," said Cleo, recovering her spirits. "Auntie Major would never pay for a wire as long as that. And I am really so glad she is married. I liked the major, didn't you, Zita?"

"Yes, and I am sure Sylvia would have married him before, only——"

"She hated to give me up," chirped Cleo wickedly.

"You were rather a good investment," ventured Margaret. "I hope the major owns a

yacht and that Cousin Sylvia won't forget her poor relations, especially the Carews."

"Oh, a yacht! Do you really mean it, Margie?" Cleo's eyes danced.

"Well, an airship or a discarded army hydro-plane would do nicely. What use would a major uncle's decorations be if they didn't carry freight?" Margaret was looking very sweet and her visit was proving delightful to every one. Cleo loved her, and Zita was very, very fond of her. In fact Margaret was a real addition to the little household.

"Now, you will tell me this, Zita. Am I any relation to you or are you any relation to me?" Cleo wanted all relationships cleared up fully.

"Yes, I am sort of an aunt to you, dear," she said slowly. "After your dear mother died your father married—my little sister!"

"Oh!" Cleo swallowed the word. Her daddy had married Zita's little sister!

"It's confusing," said Margaret kindly. "But you see, Cleo, your father was an author and I've always heard our folks say he was a wonderfully attractive man. Your own mother died when they were only a short time——"

"Less than two years married," Zita assisted.

"Yes; and Zita's sister had been your mother's

friend, just as Zita was, so it was quite reasonable that your daddy should care for her." Margaret was most eager to do her part in explaining.

"Oh, of course," said Cleo vaguely. "But what happened to daddy?"

Both young women looked gravely at the girl, waiting to hear the story so long denied her. Surely she was absorbing a heart full of family history now. Finally Zita spoke.

"He was only married to my little sister a single year," she said, "when he met with an automobile accident."

"Where?"

"Here, in this city."

"And he died here?"

"After a month of every possible sort of effort to save him. He was one of the most popular young authors in this city, dear. You have every reason to be proud of his memory."

For a few moments no one spoke. Then:

"I am going to have his picture and mother's reframed," said the child tenderly. "It is so good to know that everybody loved them."

"Perhaps too well," murmured Zita. But she did not intend Cleo to hear that. There was still one chapter in the tragic history left untold.

But Zita's secret trouble was not forgotten by

Cleo. She longed to ask that it be told her now. She was not at all excited, as her two companions seemed to fear, and she was feeling a great rush of tenderness for every one, even for the fussy Aunt Sylvia, now that she was safely on the ocean.

As if fearing a question Zita jumped up and playfully took Cleo in her arms. She could not herself bear any more just now.

"You have got to be an awfully good girl now," she warned playfully. "Remember I have full control."

"You always have had," said Cleo, wiggling to the floor. She was getting too big to be comfortable even in Zita's arms, except with the additional support of a good, big chair that enfolded them both.

"Surely we are going to celebrate," proposed Margaret. "What shall we have for dinner? Let me help fix things up."

"A wedding feast for Aunt Sylvia," chimed in Cleo. "Can we, oh, please, Guardie," (to Zita) "can we send a message for Nellie, and can we get the cook to send in a real wedding feast, with candles on the cake——"

They all laughed. The hotel-apartment could call for almost anything at any time and get it.

"Aren't you a little mixed, Honeydew?" asked

Margaret. "Sylvia wouldn't care for the candles, likely, and you are still in the doctor's care. I agree with you he is a fraud, but we have got to be guided by the powerful and influential Zita. Say, Zit, by the way, are we all any richer?"

"Oh, I never thought of that," cried Cleo dancing around again. "Aunt Sylvia had all my money, didn't she? Is there any left, Guardie?"

"There ought to be," replied Zita warmly. "Sylvia was a good manager and careful that you should be provided for. Your inheritance from your father's mother was a considerable sum. I must say for Sylvia, she was and is peculiar but honest; I am sure when things are settled we will find everything satisfactory." That was as much as she cared to say just then. It sounded stiff, but it involved a stiff question.

"But I couldn't be sure I'd have the money," murmured Cleo, "so I'd better keep Shammy at the flowers. You are sweet, Zita, not to ask me what I intend doing with all the money." She winked openly at Margaret.

"I know it must be something worthy—nothing else would interest you. And since we are having such a first-class love feast, I do believe it would be perfect if you could bring in Nellie and her mother, Cleo. I always feel better when

I have had a chance to talk things over with Rose Glennon."

"I—like—that!" Margaret drawled. "And a perfectly good and appreciative audience at hand." Then she laughed. "But I'll phone for a messenger to get your friends," she promptly offered. "I agree with you both we should make this a company occasion."

"Safety in numbers," said Zita aside, and Margaret understood she did not want to give Cleo too much opportunity for further and more intimate questioning.

They would celebrate, and Nellie would be sure to come with her mother. As there was no way of reaching them by phone the messenger was called from the hotel.

"It will do her good," Margaret kept insisting, referring to Cleo, and she had little trouble in convincing Zita of the truth of her argument.

It was so simple a matter to order a feast in this apartment. All one had to do was to touch a button and give orders to the general chef, who presently had everything prepared and brought up on the dumb-waiter. There must have been a kitchen some place, but its world was remote, indeed, from the soft furnishings of those rooms called apartments.

Cleo had been induced to wear a fancy little robe and not to excite herself with dressing. She was glad to agree, for dressing still meant hardship, and she was not anxious to get back to her tasks.

Zita came in the living room presently with wraps on for the street.

"Going out?" Cleo asked in surprise.

"Not far. There is something I have to attend to. Shall I fetch you some new fruit?"

"Pears, please," said Cleo simply, and Margaret asked for another magazine.

When Zita closed the door Cleo questioned Margaret:

"Why does she go out every evening at this time?"

"Why," stammered Margaret, "she wants a little air—and exercise, I suppose."

The answer was so plainly evasive Cleo shook her head.

"Is it a secret?"

"What?"

"Where she goes?"

"No—Zita hasn't any secrets from you, has she?"

"I don't know." Thoughts of the Lady-Cloud and the "sick friend" fought for recognition,

but Cleo feared to mention either. Perhaps Margaret didn't know so much as she herself knew. She cautiously changed the subject, and an hour later the pretty table was all arranged.

"Isn't it really too bad to have the feast without the bride?" said Cleo dutifully, after everything was safely done, of course.

"I am sure she is having a feast wherever she is," replied Margaret. "And since you have been supposed to be ill, you fraud, we have been living à la buffet, so this will be a welcome treat for us."

"There's Nellie!" exclaimed Cleo, for two short rings gave the clue, and when Margaret opened the door, sure enough there was Nellie and her mother, "large as life."

Cleo was superbly happy, she just bubbled in it. She tried to tell as much of the good news as she could fit into gasps and exclamations while Nellie listened, enthralled. It was almost as if Cleo had found a real mother, and Nellie had always loved Zita and rather feared the lofty Miss Sylvia, so she too was rejoicing sincerely.

Mrs. Glennon had just donned a generous apron and was waiting for the meal to arrive. Also, she fussed around, always finding some-

thing useful to do, for a woman like Mrs. Glennon fully realizes that mortals make work, and some one "has to do it if the world is to be kept going straight."

In a short time Zita returned, and she seemed happier and her eyes were sparkling; Mrs. Glennon asked no questions. The fruit and magazine were put in place and everything was soon in readiness for the novel feast.

Presently the buzzer sounded, announcing the arrival of the big trays and when all the party were seated at the table, that glittered with glass and silver and was otherwise resplendent with choice sprigs of dainty flowers, the little company led by Zita, who was now really the hostess, began their feast.

The children laughed and the grown-up "children" joked, but somehow the occasion seemed invested with a rite truly significant.

"It's too bad Sylvia can't be here," said Mrs. Glennon, as if apologizing to the absent bride for their usurping of a bride's privilege.

"We'll write her we did it all by proxy," suggested Cleo. She was unutterably happy. She felt free as a little bird released from a cage.

"It was your idea, Cleo, and you will have to tell it," warned Margaret.

"Could we send her a piece of the cake?" suggested Nellie simply. The cake was pretty on top, and rich in the cutting, for Mrs. Glennon "put a knife in it" to find out what was under the fancy crust.

"If it would keep," Cleo answered Nellie's suggestion, "but cake always gets dry. And besides she might not understand our fun."

"That cake would keep for her next wedding," Mrs. Glennon joked. "But I don't imagine Sylvia would enjoy our wedding feast at her expense." She brushed the cake crumbs away as she said that.

"She isn't paying for it," spoke up Cleo, a flash of her old-time resentment shining through.

"Oh, I don't mean the money—but the occasion," Mrs. Glennon corrected.

Zita gave way to the others in conversation, but otherwise she "did the honors," sat at the head of the table and was gracious as any hostess might wish to be. Every one seemed anxious to talk about the real surprise of the day—the change of Cleo's guardians; but even she, usually reckless in her choice of time, so long as it afforded her the chance she desired, did not now speak of Zita's new station.

"Better later," Cleo decided privately. "The wedding feast is enough just now."

And so it proved to be, for, in spite of the apparent release from restrictions, Zita was seeing to it that the "patient" took nothing not actually allowed by her convalescent schedule. As guardian, legally installed, she was taking no chances.

"You are not out of the woods yet," warned Mrs. Glennon, "and a day or two more won't hurt you. Be good now," she ordered, genially.

"So Nellie has a story to tell, too," remarked Zita, glancing over at the little girl, who under the glare of her pink candle shade seemed flowerlike in her simple way—wild flower, perhaps, but soft and velvety in color and glints.

She flushed and looked to her mother for a reply. Mrs. Glennon responded:

"Oh yes, she's coming out, Cleo, you certainly started her off when you took her to that rehearsal," and her pleasant face emitted something like a wink that ended up in a quirk. "But we'll tell you all about it later. Can't afford to let these chops go cold while we talk. Pile in." So good-natured were Mrs. Glennon's remarks they couldn't really sound rude.

This seemed like good advice and it was

promptly acted upon. At the end of the meal Cleo whispered to Margaret:

"Could we make up a box, with cakes and things with a few flowers on top?"

"For whom?"

"For Zita's sick friend," she said simply. Margaret gave her a searching look, then promised to make up the box herself. She wondered how much Cleo knew, just as Cleo continued to wonder how much she knew.

"We must have a toast for Sylvia's good luck and happiness," announced Zita as the meal was finished. "Let's toast her with our candles, that she may always have the light of love—and wisdom to guide her."

They stood, and each held attentively a little glass candle stick, with its shaded soft pink light flickering prettily over their upturned faces.

"The light of love and wisdom!" Cleo repeated dramatically.

"For Sylvia, the major's bride," responded Margaret fittingly.

Then they waited for the candles to finish their toast.

CHAPTER XVII

CONFIDENCES

AT last Cleo knew, or understood, at least some of the things that had so long puzzled her.

"Imagine Zita's sister having married my ——" she checked her thoughts before they finished the sentence in words, but the words were there, all ready to be expressed. Yes, Zita's sister had married Cleo's father and Zita's sister would therefore be Cleo's step-mother.

It was all very confusing, but Cleo had been living in confusion for the past three years, and these newly acquired facts of her turbulent life she seemed almost unable to fully understand.

Was it disgraceful, to have a step-mother?

Of course it wasn't, lots of step-mothers are the very best kind; even Cleo knew that.

No, the matter that really caused her embarrassment was not anything like that, it was just what her Aunt Sylvia had done to her. And

with the very best of intentions. She had been trying to make a perfect little lady to order, by the absurd process of forcing her into fashionable schools and circles, quite as if a garden rose were not as beautiful a flower as a hot-house rose when its little velvet heart is laid bare!

Cleo could not sleep as she pondered over her queer position. Surely her Aunt Sylvia had meant everything for the best, but she didn't stay with Cleo to find out how her plans had worked, or had not worked, and she really didn't know.

The girls hadn't "taken her up." She had been invited to small affairs, and her teachers had urged her forward, because of her talent for plays and her attractiveness, but all that had failed to put the girl where her ambitious aunt had hoped to place her. And Cleo knew this, and felt it, and was now very indignant about it.

"But Nellie," she was prompting her busy brain as she lay there thinking hard thoughts into that friendly pillow, "I'll always have Nellie. She's real, she's my own true girl friend, Nellie Glennon."

And the unhappy little girl fell asleep finally, telling herself just that.

It took days to straighten matters out. Cleo

was at first determined not even to go back to her classes but Zita argued her into a more sensible view of the situation. Margaret was a wonderful help and seemed to understand everything. How she ever withstood Cleo's barrage of questions and avoided answering the awkward ones was truly remarkable.

For there was yet much to be explained, the Lady-Cloud, for instance. Cleo knew there was a real mystery hiding behind that little incident. And all her carefully planned detective work must be worked out; that possibility held promise of real adventure.

But when Nellie finally came over again, with more prettily ironed things, Cleo first demanded to know about her singing. Shammy had only hinted, but Cleo wanted to know from Nellie, first hand.

"Do tell me, Nellie," she begged, "what did Mr. Warwick say about your voice?" They were curled up on a divan in the living room, Nellie luxuriating in the soft comfort, which was a treat to her, while Cleo was unconscious of everything except Nellie.

"Oh, Cleo," gurgled the little brown-haired girl, "of course I can sing just a little," she faltered modestly.

"But what did Mr. Warwick say about it?" insisted the girl who knew too much about professional opinion.

"Oh, you know, Cleo, no one can sing at all until the voice is trained, but he said——" She stopped again and Cleo actually had to shake her.

"What?" she demanded.

"He said—it had some—quality!"

What a squeeze Nellie got when she said that!

"Oh, then, then, you'll learn to sing and I'll, I'll learn——" Cleo stopped very suddenly. She bit her lip and shook her head.

"What's the matter, Cleo?" Nellie asked in surprise.

"Oh, nothing," faltered the other girl, "but I'm not going to be foolish another single day. I won't imagine things as I have done. O Nellie, you have no idea what a little fool I have been." Cleo burst out excitedly.

Nellie stared. What ailed Cleo? She always had been different from all the other girls Nellie Glennon knew, but then—she just was different. And Nellie liked her that way. Now, she was threatening to do something new, different, and maybe it wouldn't be wise.

Cleo quickly guessed at her companion's

doubts, and attempted to smile them away. Also she deftly changed the subject.

"Did you ever see any of Presto's folks?" Cleo asked suddenly.

"Yes, a youngish sort of a woman goes out with her," Nellie replied. "She seems like a foreigner—so light and so sort of—washy."

"Swedish, I think," suggested Cleo. "You know, Nell, I believe her people were circus folks. She can do almost anything."

"They were. Presto told me she had been all over and just loved stunts—the dangerous kind," Nellie explained. "She's wonderfully athletic."

"That's how we got her to come to our class. She was working in a gym and Mr. Bender discovered her," Cleo went on. "She goes to other classes too, I think. I am so anxious to have her come see me. I asked Shammy to persuade her. She might tell us all about the circuses," ventured Cleo, again quite like her sensational little self.

"I know she will be glad to come," declared Nellie. "Shall I ask her to come with me? We've got quite friendly and she's awfully nice."

"Let's plan something," proposed Cleo, banging cushions as a start. "Let's us make up some

sort of party. It is going to be wonderful now. Nell, with only Zita to consult," she declared happily, with a sigh of relief.

"Isn't it? She's the darlingest——"

"Guardie. I think I ought to call her something sweeter than that, though. What would you think would be nice, Nellie?" Cleo asked critically.

"She's so sort of chummy; you can't hardly think of her as a guardian, or an aunt. I think she's more like a big sister," Nellie declared.

"So do I, and I guess when I don't want to say Zita, I'll say Sis. I never had a sister, and I wanted one all my life," prattled Cleo.

"That's why you—adopted me?"

"That's just why!" declared Cleo tossing a little red satin heart pillow at Nellie's willing head. The "dream pillow" had been one of Cleo's last year's valentines, and it was, indeed, very pretty.

"When shall I ask Presto to come?" Nellie asked next.

"Wait till I talk it over with Margaret," her companion proposed. "She's a dear at making lovely plans and I'm sure she will have one ready for us," went on Cleo. "Imagine me being

almost as free as you are, Nellie? Isn't it too lovely?"

"I can't imagine it," admitted the brown-eyed girl. "You know, Cleo, you are rich and I am poor."

"I am not rich," contradicted Cleo. "I wouldn't wonder but my money is all used up. The very idea of all this fuss." A sweeping gesture encompassed all of the fuss it could.

Nellie wasn't quite positive about that, but to be on the safe side she intended to agree on the new guardianship, at any rate.

"Say, Nellie!" Cleo began presently and her voice betrayed something really serious as being imminent, "did you ever hear about my going—to the police station?"

"Surely. I read all about it!"

"Read all about it! Was it in the paper?"

"Didn't you even know that?" Nellie wondered if she had divulged something secret, and showed alarm at the possibility.

"Why, no," faltered Cleo. "Those first few days I was supposed to be sick, you know: I didn't see any papers. But honestly, I was only tired out and perhaps a little nervous. But no one ever said a word about that. And I especially asked that reporter not to write a thing

about it." Cleo was vexed, but of course she knew little about the ways of reporters.

"He said you asked him not to publish it; that is, the reporter said so in the piece," Nellie tried to make clear. "And it was too funny!" She laughed a little and couldn't help it, in spite of her efforts to choke on the first threatening giggle.

"Please tell me. What was the story like? What did it say?" Cleo begged to know.

"I've got it home. I'll bring it next time," Nellie promised. "And the picture was splendid!"

"He didn't take a picture!"

"It was snapped in the police station," Nellie went on, while her companion gasped. "And the story said that the captain had taken a great notion to you," volunteered Nellie, pleased to pay the tribute.

"A notion to me, indeed! And he let them steal my picture!" cried Cleo. "I hope to goodness he didn't tell them what I went there for."

"No. It was written as an interview with the captain and a police woman, and said both refused to be interviewed. And it said too, that 'the youngster was spunky.' I couldn't ever imagine you being spunky, Cleo," laughed Nellie.

"Well, I don't care. I think that's dreadfully

mean, and I'm going to write Captain Tynan," Cleo threatened. "But perhaps I hadn't better," she decided suddenly. "He might get news some day and not bother to send it to me. You know, Nellie," she continued, "I went to see if I could find out anything about the lost baby. I had a dreadful time, but it was a little funny in spots; yet I never found out a single thing," she deplored sadly. "Have you been investigating?" This sounded important and brought Nellie to a perfectly upright pose.

"Yes, indeed I have been, Cleo," she responded promptly and crisply. "I have asked a lot of folks and there's Stella, a little girl in our school. No one seems to know who *she* is."

"Really! Could she be from the Perry House?" Glowing possibility danced on the thought. "How could we find out?" panted Cleo.

"I'm going to ask Mrs. Burke first chance I get."

"But you have to *make* a chance," insisted Cleo. "Just see what I did!"

"I know. Yes, I'll make a chance, perhaps tomorrow," Nellie promised. "You see, I have been having those extra singing lessons and then I had to attend to mother's errands." Score

one for Nellie! She did help some with the business of home making in spite of her great ambition.

"Oh, I wouldn't have you neglect anything," Cleo hastened to assure her. "But I do hope we will succeed. You see, our Girls' Amateur Detective Bureau is the only one like it in the world, I think, and we have just got to find the basket baby, or the Bureau won't be any good, will it?"

"But I thought Shammy belonged? And Timmie and Tommy?"

"They do. They're all active members."

"Then it can't be a Girls' Bureau!"

"No, that's so," agreed Cleo. "What'll we call it?" she wondered in confusion.

They both pondered. Many names were suggested and rejected. Cleo wanted the word "detective" and insisted that should stand; Nellie was perfectly agreeable but couldn't work out anything that sounded right. It was finally agreed to use letters only and that these should stand for Lost Babies Detective Staff.

"Suppose we should want to detect something else?" suggested Nellie, with praiseworthy enterprise.

"Then let's be the Young People's Detective

Staff," Cleo argued. "I've dreamed all my life of being a detective and finding out all the secrets and solving all the great mysteries," she confessed, "and now that we're really started I'm thrilled every time I read of a mystery solved. I think a splendid detective is the most brilliant man in the world," she declared, so like a very little girl that even Nellie smiled broadly.

"Stage carpenters are my heroes," Nellie admitted. "And mother jokes every time I look at a tack or a hammer. All the same, I believe it's on account of daddy having been a stage carpenter that I got a chance to study singing," Nellie said wisely.

"Maybe," said Cleo, politely overlooking her own part in the transaction.

"But you know," Nellie added, "I'm too young to use my voice yet. I'm really only taking little exercises."

The evening was passing rapidly. Zita and the others had been talking uninterruptedly in the dining room. That they chose that location indicated secrecy, but the girls had the same end in view when they passed through the living room into the tiny alcove for their confidences.

There was a general stir now, however, and Nellie knew it meant home.

"Be sure to let me know about bringing Presto," she reminded Cleo.

"You be sure to let me know about little Stella," Cleo reminded her.

These were only samples of all the admonitions that followed, until Mrs. Glennon declared Nellie was acting like a young lady already, and she hoped she hadn't been a foolish woman to allow her to go to that singing teacher, where she might be getting her head filled with silly notions.

"It will do her good!" again insisted Margaret, champion of girls and fun. "I wish they would find something I could do. I'm getting the 'am-bish' fever myself."

"Don't you ever feel a touch of it, Zita?" asked Mrs. Glennon, buttoning the worn blue coat and winking broadly at Margaret.

"I feel so many things tonight I'm not sure which is what," replied Zita, evasively.

But when Zita kissed Cleo good night an hour later, and finally loosed the two loving arms that clung to her in new-found happiness, she sighed hopefully. A new world seemed to be opening up to all of them in this precious freedom.

"Lady-Cloud!" Cleo murmured in her sleep

or was she asleep? "Tell me about the Lady-Cloud," she murmured again.

"Hush!" whispered Zita, "we must have no more clouds, little girl. You have been so smothered in—in all this." She adjusted a very soft and fluffy pillow, most carefully.

But presently Cleo lay there quietly, asleep and perhaps already dreaming.

CHAPTER XVIII

LITTLE DETECTIVES

"ISN'T it strange? Now that I can tell her and that I am free to do so I don't see just how to go about it," Zita was talking to Margaret some time after Aunt Sylvia's wedding feast.

"But it will be much better for you all when she knows," replied Margaret. "You see what trouble her sleuthing got her into. I mean that trip to the police station. How can we know what she may try next?"

"I realize that," conceded Zita. "Still, after guarding the secret so closely—you know Sylvia always felt that much depended on Cleo not knowing about Madeleine, now somehow I feel I am taking advantage of her absence if I suddenly tell the child."

"You are just too sensitive," declared Margaret. "The trouble is, Zita, you were always too self-sacrificing. Mother says the whole

family just marvel at the life you have been leading. And with such prospects as you had——”

“Madeleine was just as popular——” This referred to Zita’s sister who was really Cleo’s step-mother.

“But she chose to make her own life; you have given yours for her. Now you are debating whether you should talk to Cleo. Why, Zita, Cleo acts like a baby sometimes, but it’s only because she has been brought up alone, without any real companions and with Sylvia watching her every breath. That’s all abnormal and makes her—jerky.”

“I know it. But, you see, what a slave habit can make of the best of us,” said Zita. “I find myself constantly questioning Sylvia’s wishes—wondering whether she would like things this way or that.”

“But you know you were to be Cleo’s guardian when Sylvia should marry?”

“Yes.”

“Even if you were married?”

“There was no mention made of that, but as I am not married it doesn’t matter.” Zita looked far away with eyes that failed to see things. She seemed absorbed and a little weary, but

nothing more definite than natural anxiety could be traced in her manner.

"But tell me what did Madeleine say? I should love to go around and see her. Can I?" Margaret asked eagerly.

"I have just been thinking there is no longer any reason why she should be kept so alone," Zita said, in a way that betrayed how long and seriously she had been thinking over the statements. "She is perfectly normal and at times quite lively. She had a bad spell a month ago; she was upset by a letter. That was the time she came here. She felt she would have to see Cleo," the young woman went on quietly. "I always told her Sylvia insisted Cleo should not be worried and that Cleo's temperament might be upset by the sudden revelation. That was Sylvia's idea, but I think she was extreme in the matter. Since Madeleine has grown so much stronger she naturally resented this, and really, Margaret, it seems to me now that it was very unnecessary from the beginning. I never approved of so much secrecy. But you know Sylvia," Zita answered, wearily.

"Yes, that was just Sylvia's way. I don't wonder Cleo thought she cared for nothing but the allowance checks," Margaret interjected.

"Personally I think it was all pride—she wanted Cleo's name to be known socially and she wouldn't take any chances at her being upset or made nervous lest it would spoil her personality. Oh, well," sighed Margaret, "you can do as you think best now. How long has Madeleine been here?" she asked, reverting to the mysterious subject.

"About a year. Before that there didn't seem to be any good reason for burdening Cleo with the anxiety, for we never thought Madeleine could recover. But she really has recovered now, and I feel as if my life's work has been some success, after all," Zita concluded.

"I am so anxious to see her. Mother says she was very beautiful."

"She is still, *I* think," Zita added.

They were up on the roof getting fresh air, in the same corner that had sheltered Nellie and Cleo when they told their secrets and ran from the Lady-Cloud. It was early evening also, and the children, Cleo and some young friends from the French class, were having a social time all to themselves in the living room below.

"And she was so pleased, you say, about the box from the party," continued Margaret referring to the "friend" to whom Cleo had sent the

box of dainties without knowing who the "friend" might be.

"Yes, it had an almost magical effect, really. Perhaps, the news of Sylvia's marriage actually caused it, but when Madeleine saw the box and Cleo's flowers—well, it just seemed like the climax and I was almost afraid of the result. But she is so much stronger I am not afraid now, and, do you know, Margaret, she asked me—if Cleo knew." Zita paused and sighed.

"When are you going to tell her?" Margaret asked evenly.

"I don't know——"

"If you delay it, Zita, she may run off to a few more police stations," warned Margaret.

"I'm trusting you to take care that doesn't happen," retorted Zita.

"But you trusted me before."

They both laughed a little. Margaret was frank in admitting she had made rather a poor care-taker when Cleo "had a scheme on hand."

"Well, girlie," said Zita, putting a hand affectionately on Margaret's arm, "I can't tell you what a real blessing you have been to us. I have been feeling for a long time that Cleo was right in rebelling against all the fussing, dressing and conditioning, but it was not an easy matter for

me to plan and provide real companionship for her. Now you happen along just in time and make all the happy little plans I have really forgotten how to make. There is nothing like youth to mingle with youth, after all," decided the older woman.

"Provided we have a good wise counsellor within easy reach," appended Margaret. "But about this detective business. What ever got the girl started on that?" she wanted to know.

"First thing I knew she was selling her flowers, and other little things, even some dainty handkerchiefs, I found she had disposed of," replied Zita to that. "I didn't mind, really, as most children want their own money and Sylvia's idea was to spend Cleo's money for her. But when the child talked of secrets, and what she wanted to do and didn't want to tell me about, I did fear she might use up too much of her sentimentality. Still, Nellie's mother insisted it would all pass over, and that every girl goes through the same sort of nonsense. She says Nellie wants to be a carpenter, and here we have Cleo wanting to be a detective," Zita smiled as she pointed out.

"But Cleo had a strong motive behind her queer doings," pressed Margaret, anxious to

defend her young friend's unusual activities.

"Yes. She guessed that the story withheld from her hinged on the loss of the baby. It was very easy for her to pick up that much; but why should she imagine she could find it in this big city and after more than ten years?"

"I think her ideas of real life have all been gathered from the reading of those silly detective stories," suggested Margaret, "and a little thing like ten or twelve years elapsing in a big city, would never bother that sort of story, you know."

"That's exactly it," agreed Zita. "And I always told Sylvia the girl needed more freedom. That is why she consented to have little Nellie come. Sylvia felt there was attraction in illusion, and she just hid Cleo behind a wall of mystery here. But she climbed over the wall safely," she remarked. "Just see what friends she and Shammy are."

"Have you any idea what she intends to do with the flower money?"

"I haven't, really, but it is sure to be something very heroic. You heard how she actually loaded up a city ambulance with a big floral supply? I never knew an ambulance doctor to take as much as a pair of pajamas along for the

patient, yet this one very generously accepted a stack of flowers for little Tommy."

"Cleo has a way with her," laughed Margaret as they arose to leave the roof and join the children in the apartment. It was nearing the hour when late afternoon would fade into early evening and Cleo's guests would be soon leaving.

"Her little friend didn't come," remarked Margaret. "She seems to fancy this girl particularly."

"Yes, I suppose because she's different. I believe she is a girl who was trained as an acrobat, and you know Sylvia insisted Cleo should not do any jumping or springing in her acting, even in the charity play and her part called for it. She always felt any strain might be too much for her, so it was arranged to have Presto 'take the bumps' as they call it. Cleo objected strenuously, and I think myself it was all nonsense, but again there was Sylvia."

The girls were now gone, and Cleo, as usual, felt a sense of relief. But when Nellie came she was happy again and she hurried to ask about the detective work.

"Tell me about Stella," she begged, before Nellie quite got her breath. "Did you see the woman she lives with?"

"Yes, but Cleo, I felt so foolish," Nellie

answered. "We haven't any clue to go by."

"Of course we have," declared Cleo. "The baby had a scar on her left foot. You know, I told you about it. It was like a little red heart."

"Did you tell me that?" asked Nellie. "But even if you did how could we go inspecting girls' feet?" She wanted to laugh but Cleo's face forbade levity.

"We couldn't, of course, that's the reason I didn't make you understand it, I suppose," explained Cleo. "But it is a clue. Besides, her name was pasted on her arm and there was a little silver case left with her in the basket. I think that plenty to work on."

Nellie was too polite to say what she thought, besides she was learning something of her friend's disregard for mere details. Cleo was the sort of girl who jumped at conclusions.

"But what did the woman say about Stella?" Cleo asked again. "You said she was so pretty I hoped we might ask the real important questions if the first few seemed interesting. What did she say?"

"Mrs. Burke said Stella's father is a young marine, a sea captain, you know."

"That's just the same as being dead," inter-

rupted Cleo. "You know, they are always dead or on sea."

"But he isn't dead; he comes in to shore and brings her the most wonderful things. Was the father of the basket baby dead?" asked Nellie.

"Oh yes, that was what made the mother so desperate. You see, she had kind of a brain storm and left the baby there: then she became very ill and for months couldn't tell anything about it. Just the way you read those things," said Cleo emotionally, "and I've always loved to have Zita tell me the thrilling story," Cleo reflected the "story" showing its influence in her wrapt expression.

"Mrs. Burke said Stella's mother was in a hospital somewhere——"

"Oh, could Stella be our baby? Do you think she might be, Nellie?" Hopeful question!

"I didn't know about the mark, the clue, I mean," added Nellie. "The other things, her name pasted on and the silver box might have been lost, of course, but the scar would be sure to stay. Don't you think so?"

"Of course it would stay," Cleo declared. "It was one of those deep red marks that always stay."

"But I know a girl who had one taken away with electric needles," protested Nellie.

"That might be, easily enough, but how could—no one would do that on her foot. A foot wouldn't matter," Cleo argued.

"I suppose not," Nellie conceded. "Mrs. Burke is friendly though, and I begged her not to say anything to Stella. She promised not to and I'm sure she won't. You see she is thankful to mother for getting Stella a chance to take singing, so I know she will oblige me. Do you think I should ask her about—the clues?"

"If you don't like to perhaps I can go," offered the fearless one.

"Oh no," cried Nellie. "Every one would wonder then. They don't notice me around there but you couldn't hide, not even in your very plainest things. You would look like a girl from up-town," explained Nellie.

"All right; do the best you can," ordered Cleo. "But don't forget what it means, Nell," she cautioned. "We have got to find that baby, even if she is a big girl now, and I know perfectly well that we are going to do it."

"I hope so," said Nellie in a small voice.

"You must *know* so," charged the chief of the

girls' and boys' detective bureau. "Now, you bring a full report upon Stella just as soon as you can."

"All right," agreed Nellie. And so they parted.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SECRET REVEALED

IT meant so much to Cleo. Her empty little life had lately grasped that one hope for adventure, the discovery of the lost little girl, as a relief from so much that had proved of so little account. And in her inexperienced way she had begun to realize that back of her own affairs, as she understood them, there was hidden a mystery. Zita had guarded this mystery faithfully, but the girl, who a short time before loved to listen to "the thrilling story" as if it were a simple fairy tale quite remote from her own life, now felt it was really a part of her life; that the lost child and the Lady-Cloud and Zita's sick friend all had to do with Cleo Kimball.

Would it or could it possibly be that the girl Stella, whom Nellie had found, had anything to do with it all? Cleo's hope in that direction was vague indeed, but every possible suspicion must be investigated, she was long ago determined, so,

of course, Nellie would have to investigate Stella.

And the great change in Cleo's own circumstances, the long-hoped-for release from the whims of the almost eccentric Aunt Sylvia, actually took second place in the girl's interest, for she was bent upon adventure and adventure in the form of finding the lost girl.

"When I find her," Cleo reasoned, "I'll know the whole mystery."

Then things began to happen. Zita would start to say something and Cleo would know it was going to be something important, then suddenly Zita would stop short. But finally when night came, on this one particular night, Cleo knew that the air was just charged with mystery, and she told Zita so.

"What's going to happen, Zita?" she asked cautiously.

"Why dear, what do you mean?"

"I can feel it; can't you?" Cleo hinted broadly.

Zita smiled and drew Cleo closer to her. They were going to have one of their real intimate chats; Cleo was in bed and Zita sat as close as her chair would allow.

"I can always tell when you are going to tell me something wonderful," she prompted.

"How?" smiled Zita.

"You act it first, you act so mysteriously," suggested the girl, waiting anxiously.

"Oh, that's it. I just wondered what made you so suspicious."

"Oh, I don't mean that you really act queer, or unreal or anything like that. But it's your eyes and your voice and even the way you breathe, that tells me some big news is coming," Cleo said tenderly.

"Little witch!" A kiss went with the charge. "Well, suppose I were to tell you the big secret?"

Cleo sprang up. Zita knew she would, just as surely as the child had anticipated Zita's own action.

"Now don't get excited," warned Zita.

"Please don't always—check me," begged Cleo. "You know, big sister, I can't enjoy things and act like a mummy."

"Of course you can't, dear," admitted her companion. "And perhaps I am getting to be a fussy old lady. But you see, I can't realize you are not really the high-strung little rebel you have always claimed to be! You used to fool me so."

"The secret! The secret!" demanded Cleo, clapping her hands and jumping about the bed in little rabbit hops.

"You will have to get right back on your pillow first. Perhaps I am the one who needs quiet. At any rate, dear, I don't feel I could think carefully if there were any confusion. You know my head really aches sometimes," admitted Zita, ruefully.

A mummy indeed Cleo might have been; she lay so still now, straight and silent. Hands clasped and eyes upturned: ruffles smooth as fluted flounces: lace cap straight and ribbon bows budding into the exactly right kind of pink flowers: a sleeping babe could not have been more impassive.

Zita was prepared to tell the little story or rather the sequel to the old story, but now when the text was demanded she rather shrank from her task.

"All ready!" announced Cleo, still rigid.

"Then listen, dear," began Zita. "You know I told you that my little sister married your daddy the year after your—mother went?"

"Yes."

"And that my dearest friend——" Zita paused. It was very difficult but she finally continued, "my dearest friend surrendered her baby to what she believed was a call from heaven."

"Yes."

"But you have never asked me who the baby's mother was or who was this friend."

"I wouldn't."

Zita leaned closer. "You have never guessed?"

"No," almost whispered.

"You thought the baby's mother died?"

"No, I thought she lived and was very sick or something."

"You were right, darling—exactly right. The lost baby was the child of—of my own sister Madeleine."

"Your own truly sister?"

"Yes: and she was the girl who married your—daddy!"

"Zita!"

Margaret was within hearing but not a sound broke the silence that followed this revelation. Zita realized that the whole truth had not yet dawned upon the girl that crowded closer to her. Then:

"Zita, it was your sister who lost the baby?"

"Yes, dear."

"And she was married to my daddy?"

"Yes; she is your step-mother."

"My step-mother! Then the lost baby would be——"

"Your step-sister."

"Oh—a—sister!"

Incredulous, startling, almost overwhelming!

"So you see, dear, you did actually have a little sister."

Subtle as mercury under a glass the emotion in Cleo's pretty face worked up and down, first in a smile and next in doubt or perplexity. The secret was not all joyous, for the thought of a lost sister was like looking at a beautiful dead flower.

"And we never could find her," sighed the child, moving away to hide the blinking eyes.

"But darling, you don't realize. You have found a—new—mother!"

"A mother!"

"My little sister Madeleine married your daddy and loved you very dearly. When her own little one came along to love you with her—the great shock spoiled it all," said Zita bravely. "But she loves you yet, and very soon I am going to bring you to see her."

This was really more than even Cleo's alert mind could immediately cope with. Having a mother—even a step-mother. She had been well satisfied with Zita and found now no active joy in the knowledge that Zita's sister was her nearest relative, nearer really than Zita.

"You will love her," Zita said earnestly. "Every one loves Madeleine Kimball."

"Is that her name?"

"Your father was Wainright Kimball."

"Oh, yes. I always sign my name Cleo W. Kimball," said the perplexed little girl. "Where is—your sister?"

"Not very far from here. I am going to take you and Margaret to see her just as soon as you feel like—being introduced."

"I'll go any time you say, Zita." But there was no warmth in Cleo's voice as she offered this.

"Don't you want to go?"

"Oh, of course. But, Zita, you know I love—you—best."

Another strangling embrace. "Yes, I know, darling, and that's only natural. When your little mother Madeleine grew ill I took you, so you see you have had a very eventful career. Three mothers, really."

"And Aunt Sylvia."

"Oh, yes: she makes four. Indeed, you are a little monopolist in the mother line."

Zita was so relieved her manner now became almost frivolous. And the vague resentment Cleo betrayed was, as she had said, only natural.

"But listen, Zita-Wita. Just how near is a step-mother?" Cleo asked after a pause.

"Sometimes very near and sometimes very dear. You must not think they are like the horrid things you may have read about. That wouldn't be fair."

"I don't," staunchly. "Helen has a step-mother and she's just like a queen, and she idolizes Helen."

"Don't be afraid, dear, that the little mother I am going to bring you to will separate us. You see, I am just like her mother also."

"You are her big sister?"

"Yes, she is small and still very pretty."

"What is she like?"

"Like your picture of Snow White, in the lovely old picture book."

"Is her hair white?" Cleo fancied a step-mother must be matronly.

"No, it is more blonde than yours."

"And her name is Madeleine? Would I call her Madeleine?"

"I think so, you would hardly think of her now as—a mother."

"No, I couldn't, Zita. But she wouldn't mind, do you think?"

"Not the least. You see, dear, she has been

so desperately ill it is only lately I have talked of you." Zita was speaking very cautiously, almost whispering.

"Does she know I am—here?" Cleo asked next. She too was speaking in an undertone.

"Yes," Zita told her. "And when she first found out she tried very hard to see you."

"Really!"

"You remember the evening you and Nellie saw—the Lady-Cloud?"

"Zita! That was she! And I ran away!"

"But why shouldn't you? I had a nurse with her every minute but even with all that precaution she managed to come over here. As she grew stronger it was almost impossible to restrain her. All the activity of brain so long banked up, just seemed to overflow, and when she found a paper with your name and this address, she just watched her chance and stepped over here."

"And was her hair hanging?"

"No, she wore a light silk scarf. Her apartment is only around our corner."

"Oh, that was it; and the scarf blew out like a cloud," Cleo recalled. "So we thought she was a Lady-Cloud, and she was, sort of."

"Yes, at that time she was still very nervous

but now she is much, very much stronger. She is almost happy since she heard of Sylvia's marriage. She sort of feared Sylvia."

"We all are happier," Cleo declared. "Poor Aunt Sylvia! Does it seem mean, Zita?"

"Not when we don't intend it to be. We all loved her as much as she ever loved us. Sylvia was not as affectionate as the rest of us. She kept us away from her," Zita attempted to explain.

"Isn't it all wonderful? Just like a play!" murmured Cleo, with an audible sigh, happy but just a little uncertain.

"I have often thought so," Zita continued. "But now that you know all about it you are going to promise to leave off your hunt for the baby; aren't you?" This was the test.

"But she is my—own sister!"

"I know, darling. Yet you couldn't possibly find her."

"Why?"

Zita sighed. It was hard to destroy such faith. Then she attempted to explain again:

"When we found how the loss of the little one affected Madeleine we did everything possible to find the child," she said. "We had searches made immediately we found what she had done with the baby. You see, the baby was only three

months old when it all happened," concluded the young woman, who was surely going through a difficult ordeal.

"Three months," repeated Cleo. "They're mostly all alike at three months."

"Yes, just little crowing babies."

"But, Zita, don't you see how much more anxious I am now? And besides, I don't feel as if this new-found mother could love me when she thinks of the other one who was truly hers."

"The tragedy has worn itself out. She is resigned and quite cheerful," insisted Zita. "I am sure that to know *you*, will give her the new interest her young life demands," Zita finished, earnestly.

"I couldn't give her up yet, Zita. I know you think I'm foolish, but I did hear they kept girls in one home until they are sixteen, and that not very long ago of one of the Perry babies was still being educated there."

"Really!" Zita brightened at this.

"Yes, and Shammy says the Perry millions are even now being divided among some of those ten babies that the Perry lady took in from the world, in her blue-satin basket," declared Cleo, dramatically.

"But we have to run down so many clues, dear.

I can't bear to see you, in your girlish impulse, being disappointed," Zita argued.

"I suppose I have been enjoying it all—a little," confessed Cleo naïvely. "You see, I never had anything real to do before. And I've found out so many interesting things about world babies—the kind that are mothered by the great big world, you know, Zita. This wonderful Miss Perry was such a mother at heart; they say, she insisted upon having every one of her babies adopted in real homes. And the only way that one could get into a public institution was for education. Shammy says if there is a Perry girl in the Personality House she must be a student there. She couldn't possibly be, what you might call an inmate," declared Cleo, now very much enlivened as they touched upon her pet plans.

"It is alluring," admitted Zita; "and any possible hope seems worth investigating. But don't you want me to help you? To make inquiries at the Personality House you speak of?"

"Zita-Wita!" The little cap went almost under Zita's arm. "You won't think I'm selfish, will you, if I ask you to let *me* do this part myself? You see, Shammy and Nellie have been planning with me, and it's something to do with—well, with a place like that."

"Very well, dear, I know I can trust you and you have promised to tell Margaret first, haven't you?" the other demanded to know.

"Yes, I won't do a single thing without telling her. She's a girl and she'll understand."

This was too innocent a thrust to be felt by the happy Zita, happy now that the long-dreaded secret was actually disposed of. That Cleo had not accepted it with real enthusiasm was no disappointment, for Zita knew that a little time was needed to adjust this or any other child to such a confusing change.

"We must soon say good night," she warned the girl then, "for our holiday is almost over. You must start school in a few days, you know."

"Yes, I know and I'm just anxious to begin in a real school. I shouldn't like vacations that lasted longer than this. Then, besides, I'm going to have Nellie with me now. She can come over every day, as long as I won't have silly classes at all sorts of hours."

"Did you enjoy your friends today? Your favorite didn't come, did she?" Zita then asked.

"You mean Presto? No, she couldn't. She is always so busy with some sort of work, she has to work, you know. But Zita, I just want you

to meet her soon. Then you will know why I'm so crazy about her," Cleo added.

"I'm sure she's clever and you say she's very quiet and that adds mystery, always. Well, dear, I'll be very glad to see this Wonder, whenever she finds time to call, and for your sake I hope it will be soon," said Zita. "And now," she pressed her fingers playfully on the flickering eyelids, "now to sleep."

"All righty," agreed Cleo slumping down obediently. She was so like a little child. "But stay a little longer, please, big sister," she entreated. "I'm so—wide awake."

"I will, dear, just tumble off now. We have talked a very long time."

Silence for a few minutes, then:

"Zita, could you tell me just one thing more? It pesters me."

"What is it?"

"Why do you always avoid going out?"

"Because, dear, it was all so tragic, and because I felt when your own mother went so suddenly, and then my sister so soon afterwards met with her life's sorrow, I didn't feel I could ever feel really happy again. Perhaps that was wrong, but I was so crushed."

"I see; I don't blame you," said the excited

child kindly. "It must have been all dreadful. But Aunt Sylvia didn't want you to go out?"

"I don't think she would have minded if I could have arranged all my work. But you see, every day or every evening when you went away I had to relieve Madeleine's nurse. Nurses are most particular about their own health, and they need to be."

"Yes." A long pause. Cleo snuggled over into confidence and whispered:

"Zita, I always thought it was about a man!"

"You ridiculous baby!" replied Zita. "I suppose every girl has a man to think of somewhere in the distance."

"That's lovely, Zita-Wita," answered Cleo. "And will you let me be your bridesmaid?"

"You and Nellie and Presto and Margaret——"

Margaret saved the hour by intruding just then, so that the wonderful evening ended up with a regular reunion of all the little family, the three of them now constituting that circle, besides the possibilities of the absent ones so soon enlarging the group.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" sighed Cleo. "But just you wait! There's going to be something more wonderful still!"

CHAPTER XX

STARTLING

EARLY, very early next morning Cleo was bustling about. All her calmness that apparently amounted to indifference toward the facts disclosed by Zita, now burst forth in a wild desire to see the newly discovered mother.

During the night she had dreamed such vague, fanciful things about a new mother, a new sister and even a new Zita, married to a handsome man who had been waiting for her during the years she devoted to Cleo and the invalid sister, Madeleine.

Cleo recalled numbers of stories wherein women had made such noble sacrifices, and she gasped a little, when considering how dreadful it would have been if all this hardship had continued longer for Zita.

"Aunt Sylvia's wedding was a real blessing," she said to Margaret, whom she had routed from the laziest of last-minute naps, just to hurry

around for the big day Cleo insisted had already fully dawned. "Yes, I just shudder when I think what we have been going through—I mean the clouds that have been hanging over us; it just frightens me," Cleo declared. "Margaret, do get up and dress for going out. I am going to beg Zita to let us go on my excursion, you know."

"To that home, that institution?" drawled Margaret, not exactly responding to Cleo's plea for haste.

"Yes. She promised I could do anything that seemed reasonable if you agreed, and you know you did agree, Margie. And you have no idea what it means to me. Just think what a joy it would be to find a real sister!" Adventure! Always the lure of adventure!

"You can have a couple of mine if you are so keen!" replied Margaret, this time going so far toward hurrying as to pat up her bobbed hair. "I have always had sisters, and I don't want to be selfish about them. Just help yourself, Cleo, and I hope you pick Mickey. She's the movie fan, you know, and I'm assigned to take her to every old picture that comes to town. You're very welcome to Mickey."

Cleo left the frivolous one and next confronted Zita.

"Zita," she began immediately, "I have been so anxious for morning—I don't believe I slept much. Can we go this morning to see—your sister?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. But why hurry so?"

"I just can't wait, Zita. I have to see her. I've been imagining and wondering until I'm all balled up. If we could go this morning, I have a little trip to make with Margie this afternoon, and you know I have to go to school tomorrow."

"You are planning for rather a full day, but I'm glad you are so anxious to go see Madeleine," answered Zita. "She is just as anxious to see you. Yes, we can go directly after breakfast," she promptly agreed.

"Zita, what should I call her?" Cleo asked again, a little nervously.

"I'm sure she would love to have you call her mother, if you feel like doing so. You know, dear, the old hurt of her own special loss may be forgotten or at least soothed in a love for you."

"Yes, that's so. But somehow—I can't think of her as mother just yet. But as you say, Zita," this was on second thought, "if it would make her happier to feel she had a daughter, even a step-daughter," (Cleo stumbled over this) "I would

do everything I could to help. First I wanted to find the baby for your sake, and now I want to find her for her mother's and for my own sake as well. If she has got any of those Perry millions Shammy tells me about, I hope they haven't spoiled her. You know how stories always have spoiled rich girls in them," pointed out Cleo.

"But that's the trouble with stories. Characters are usually overdrawn to suit the dull tastes of the majority. A thing is big or little, a person is poor or rich and——"

"Good or bad," interrupted Cleo. "That's the very thing I find fault with."

"But, Zita, I feel so queer. Here I am, what might be called fortunate, yet I just long for other things. I'll never give up the baby idea, you know, not if I have to buy—one!"

"So that's it," smiled Zita. "Be sure you get a bargain," she added facetiously, and as Margaret entered the dining room then, breakfast was called for.

Into another hotel apartment, an hour later, Zita, Cleo and Margaret went to see the convalescent Madeleine.

Cleo felt her heart throbbing and her cheeks burning. Nothing had ever given her such a thrill as this. She was almost frightened.

A maid or nurse opened the door, and Zita called into the sunny suite:

"Here we are, Madeleine! A lot of company!"

"Come right along," answered a cheery voice, and Cleo thought it very musical. She was glad of that, for she feared everything.

The next minute she stood before the newly found mother, Madeleine Kimball!

Both stood silently regarding each other for the space of a few seconds, then the young woman came forward and threw her arms about Cleo.

"Little daughter!" she murmured, choked and gasping.

"Mother dear," said Cleo dutifully, in a smothered voice.

"Now just sit down and look each other over," interrupted Zita, anxious to forestall too much emotion. "You may not suit, and you know, I am still in the background waiting——"

"Yes," chimed in Margaret. "Cousin Madeleine, you know you told me last evening that I would do in a pinch. It seems to me both of you two spoiled darlings have been too much pampered. If I had my pick of relations as you two

have, I'm sure I'd go away out to Mount Vernon."

This airy persiflage filtered through the tense moment, but did not dispel it. Cleo was following the pretty little woman to a seat by the window where the "mother" could look at her critically.

"Don't expect me not to show this, Zita," she said to her rather anxious sister. "I have just got to indulge my heart a little, now."

Zita smiled and offered no comment. Cleo felt drawn to this lovely woman just as she had always felt drawn to Zita, and in her girlish way, she promptly assigned it all to real relationship.

But it was not until Margaret insisted upon making plans for a reunion that Cleo had a chance to observe closely the woman who had tried to take her own mother's place. She noticed how blonde she was, and how small. Her eyes were dark, like Zita's—no they were like some eyes she remembered indistinctly—she could not place whose were like those, so dark and glistening with topaz glints. The resemblance plagued Cleo, yet she could not trace it. Also, there was a familiar hint in Madeleine's smooth, soft voice. It rang deep, and was peculiarly musical, and velvety.

"I suppose it is all like Zita in some way, I must have forgotten," concluded Cleo, secretly. Yet the illusive resemblance was sort of insistent and tantalizing: the kind that demands recognition.

Recovering from the first burst of surprise, Cleo glanced about now and realized this apartment was very comfortably furnished, not as elaborate as her own, but the furniture was in splendid taste, and the whole place breathed personality. The maid, she soon understood, was the nurse referred to by Zita, and no doubt, Cleo decided, the housekeeping was managed as it was in the other apartment, by the invisible aids provided in apartment hotels.

"She doesn't look a bit sick," Cleo was thinking. Then she did notice some nervous little motions and a continuous shifting of the dark, flashing eyes.

"I won't dare to ask questions this time," Madeleine said, when Margaret finally gave her a chance to address Cleo directly, "but I'll tell you, dear. Some day you and I will have a regular talking feast. Then you must tell me all about yourself. Of course Zita has been telling me," she hesitated, "but first-hand material is so very much better."

Cleo agreed to this, promptly, and when a heavy batch of mail was handed in she just wondered did it contain any message from Aunt Sylvia.

Madeleine wore a soft green morning dress, and it seemed to Cleo the flowerlike tints in the lovely lady's cheeks brought out by the tones of green in her costume could not be the flush of convalescence, that it must be from pure happiness.

"With all the care and building up, I suppose," the girl decided, just wondering if she herself followed rules would her color warm up like that. How she would love it to!

"Kitten, I believe you have me tagged for a jaunt this morning," Margaret said to Cleo when Zita and Madeleine left the room for a moment, "and I want to warn you I have an invitation to go horseback riding, and I intend to be back on time. So just breeze along if you want me to go with you," she ordered playfully.

This demand was carried out presently, and it seemed something of a relief in spite of an accompanying pleasure, to have that first, dreaded interview over. The parting was strained and it had all seemed very queer and unreal to Cleo!

And it had frightened her, although she gave no

hint of the fact, and she knew that the next meeting would be sure to lack those strained, wondering questions. She would love the Lady-Cloud when she got used to her—she was sure of that.

It was all so simple now. Zita told Madeleine they would call for her and all go for a park ride perhaps next day, and Madeleine referred to a little tea she was going to, just as soon as the big sister Zita gave permission.

So she was actually well enough to go out. Cleo was so glad of that.

But Margaret was literally dragging Cleo off, the ride beckoning her to hurry along, and finally after affectionate promises for meeting soon again, Madeleine, the wife and mother of a tragic fate, said good-bye for the time to Cleo, and so a dramatic scene was ended.

"Hustle, rustle, bustle," ordered Margaret. "Your place is miles out, and I'm going there with you now or never. Zita, we'll be back early, I promise, and I have our identification cards at hand, if we should get lost, so don't worry."

They then hailed a taxi and started off to the Personality House, where Cleo insisted there must be tangible clues of the famous Perry basket.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ADOPTION OF KATHLEEN

HER mind still whirling from the confusing event, Cleo went from room to room in the big institution known as the Personality House, and what would have fascinated her at any other time, seemed merely a detail now in her strange and uncertain quest.

"We have such inquiries almost daily," the pleasant-faced young woman who was showing them through assured her, "and it seems to me, babies grow more precious each year, judging from the number of persons who come from all parts of the country hoping to find some little one long ago lost trace of."

This statement brought relief to Cleo, who felt a little self-conscious in spite of her determination to run down all clues.

But after going over all the records the matron shook her head. There had been one young girl whose history mentioned the famous Perry

House but she was only a boarder there for a short time, and Cleo decided this might have been the girl Captain Tynan referred to.

"Then," said Cleo a little timidly, "I'd like to adopt a baby."

Margaret gasped: "Cleo!"

"You mean to adopt one to be brought up here, don't you, dear?" the lady in the office asked. "I am sure some one has told you about our auxiliary plan, and that is what you want to help with."

"Yes, one of the girls from your auxiliary came to our school last year and we all subscribed," Cleo replied, and then Margaret managed to breathe again. "So I decided if I couldn't find the one I was looking for I'd just adopt another one."

"That's a splendid thing to do," declared the superintendent. Then to Margaret she said:

"You see, little girls subscribe fifty or one hundred dollars toward the care of some especial child, and that is termed 'adopting' the child. The little mothers prove wonderfully devoted, and we have even found splendid homes for our children in that way. Shall I have some one show you through the shelter now?"

The visitors accepted the invitation gladly and

soon found themselves in a wonderful little colony of so many babies.

"Oh, how can I choose?" Cleo exclaimed, delighted at the "real-life" she so often imagined but never before had a chance to glimpse. "Margaret, isn't this one a darling?" pointing to a tot that poked two chubby little hands through bars of its crib and demanded immediate attention.

"Here is my darling!" cried out Margaret, stopping before a little pickaninny that tossed his chocolate toes up in the air and then tried to catch them on the bounce.

"Perhaps I ought to look for a red-haired baby," Cleo said finally, after becoming lost in the maze of attractions. "Have you any with freckles and red hair?"

The matron laughed. "Freckles don't come so early," she explained, "but here is the sort of soil they thrive on. This is Kathleen. She was found in a vestibule two months ago, and her identification tag reads 'Kathleen'. She's a darling," vouched the matron, and just then it seemed to Cleo that Zita's remark about getting a "bargain" was not so far-fetched as it had seemed.

"Why do you want freckles?" Margaret asked, wondering.

"Because I had a partner in the plan," Cleo stumbled, "and he's Irish and has freckles. I thought I could give him a part in this by helping an Irish baby."

"Oh, your flower sales!" Margaret whispered. "You are right, Cleo, Shammy did do a lot toward this and his taste ought to be consulted. I vote for Kathleen. She's the prettiest, any how. Just look at those eyes and that skin!"

Kathleen was picked up and handed to Cleo. Without the least sign of awkwardness the little mother made herself comfortable in a chair and cuddled the baby delightedly.

"Oh, if we could only fetch her home," she sighed, while Kathleen crowed and cooed and gurgled and "tried to talk" quite as if she realized how much depended upon her good behavior. She chewed Cleo's thumb, and she tried to grab her curls and otherwise made frantic efforts to show how much she appreciated being considered by so notable a personage as Cleo.

"I'll take her!" spoke Cleo suddenly and Margaret burst into a gale of laughter.

"Take her!" she repeated. "It is just like——" But she caught herself before the words "bargain sale" could spoil it all.

Instantly the new interest fired Cleo's imag-

ination. To really pay something toward this darling's care with her own pleasure money! To have some one to think of all the time; some one to send things to and some one really to care for! Wasn't personal responsibility in the Personality House plan simply wonderful?

Reluctantly she handed Kathleen back to the nurse and reluctantly Kathleen went. In fact, she kicked and squealed and protested so vigorously that Cleo had difficulty in convincing herself she should really give her back. However, the exchange was successfully effected at last, and also "at last" Margaret succeeded in enticing Cleo outside the Shelter into the office.

"I'm so happy," Cleo exclaimed, giving her savings, all of fifty dollars, over to the woman, who handed her a pretty certificate of "Adoption for Kathleen." "It doesn't seem nearly so bad now not to have succeeded in my detective work."

"I think this is all simply wonderful," declared Margaret, in one of her rarely serious moments. "Makes me feel as if I ought to sell fudge or something and adopt the little Chocolate Drop myself."

"You should," insisted Cleo.

"But pray, let me have my ride with Sir

Launcelot first," begged Margaret. "I look rather well on a cob."

Back home again they found Nellie waiting, and Cleo was naturally so much excited she all but forgot Nellie's assignment in the Stella clue. Even Zita agreed adopting a baby in the new way was ideal, and promised to have Madeleine join her in assuming financial responsibility for another little one—the one with brown curly hair and brown eyes that Cleo liked best next to Kathleen.

At last Nellie broke in on the conversation. She managed to get Cleo aside and indicated she had a report to make.

"No," she said without preamble or introduction, "Stella hasn't got any marks on her feet."

"Oh," exclaimed Cleo, dragging her mind back to the neglected detective interest. "I didn't suppose she had."

"But you wanted me to ask?"

"Just to make sure. We had to do that, but now with Kathleen on our hands I think we will have enough to do." She was putting Kathleen on "our hands" automatically, and Nellie was promising to go on to the Personality House very, very soon.

"I just feel choked with good news," declared

Cleo. "You'll love Madeleine—that is, Zita's sister, as soon as you see her," she informed Nellie authoritatively.

"Mother told me all about it last night," replied Nellie. "And if I didn't have my new singing lesson to think of I'm afraid I'd be jealous."

"Oh, you wouldn't, Nell! You have always had real things. And listen!" (whispers) "Margaret told me Zita has a young man who has been waiting for her ever since she came to take care of me and—her sister. Tommy's mother found his card on some flowers, and now the very next thing we do will be to have Zita take time off for her own personal interests. I'm sure she deserves it," declared Cleo with real businesslike promptness.

"I think so too," agreed Nellie.

"One wonder starts another," sighed Cleo. "How shall I ever begin school again, Nellie?"

"You'll love it, and you ought to start soon," declared Nellie.

"My sakes but things are rushing! I'm almost dizzy with it all. Nellie, I haven't even thanked you for running down the Stella clue. I know it must have been awfully hard to ask a girl about her feet."

Laughter, delicious and delayed, swayed the

two little chums, and only the thought of making things for Kathleen—Nellie had already promised enough pretty things to fit a small "hope chest" and Cleo was expanding on her knowledge of knitting to make many pretty little things out of worsteds. If it had not been for this sort of practical work the girls might have lost track of reality and believed that their little Kathleen was only a darling mite of a fairy, after all.

To have charge of a real live baby! To feel personally responsible for at least many of its actual needs! Wasn't this a joyous experience? Wouldn't any girl simply love to go through with it?

Cleo had told Nellie about Madeleine. Having even a step-mother was truly wonderful and she tried to show her delight at the situation. But even simple-minded little Nellie could easily see where Cleo's love was strongest. Zita would always be her love-mother whoever else might have the more reasonable claim.

Wisely the older folks did not attempt to force any show of sentimentality. The Lady-Cloud was now a very lovely reality, able to take her place with Zita and Margaret watching the affairs of the girl whose young life had been so peculiarly bemazed.



‘PERHAPS I OUGHT TO LOOK FOR A RED-HAIRED BABY,’
CLEO SAID FINALLY.

Cleo's Misty Rainbow.

Page 253

Day upon day new and better plans were made; day after day Nellie and Cleo sought reports from their "lieutenants," especially from Timmie and Shammy, Cleo still being determined to keep up her interest in the absurd little detective bureau.

But hope was waning. Shammy showed positive indifference to the "crazy idea," now, declaring brazenly that Kathleen was the real thing, and that a baby in hand was worth many at large. Timmie, who had been proud to follow Nellie's instructions in his search, couldn't see "any good in it now" either.

"They's hundreds of lost babies goin' on here all the time," he pointed out, shaking his tousled head conceitedly. "We should worry about that there one."

"But Timmie," argued Nellie—he was waiting for her to find out if she could go to an afternoon movie, and she knew very well she couldn't. "Timmie," she called him up sharply, "that's no way to treat my friend."

"C'on," he urged, "they's a swell picture——"

"I don't care to go," cut in Nellie haughtily, so that settled Timmie for that afternoon.

Nellie herself was busy that day and the next, for she was now taking piano lessons and prac-

ting at Miss Condit's who taught her and insisted upon doing so without immediate recompense. Also she had to carry some extra fine lace handkerchiefs fresh from her mother's dexterous ironing to Miss Adele Polhemus, who lived in one of the big hotels.

But the day and hour came quite opportunely for her to see Cleo again, for Nellie had an invitation to go that very afternoon to see Presto swim in the big gym pool, where a girls' match was to be held, and she was going to ask Cleo to go with her.

"Oh, I'll love it," Cleo declared, when the invitation was given and Nellie sat in her favorite chair in Cleo's living room waiting for her answer. Waiting is not strictly correct, however, for Nellie didn't have to wait a minute. Cleo just jumped at the chance to go.

"I've been so crazy to see Presto," she added. "Do you know, Nell, we never thought of asking her about the lost girl? And she's been around so much she might easily have heard."

"That's so," agreed Nellie, amicably, as usual. "Well, we'll have a good chance to ask her this afternoon, when she's waiting her turn to go in the pool. Let's go early."

"Let's," repeated Cleo, and then Kathleen's

new and wonderful wardrobe fell under their tender discussion.

Nellie had made two bibs, think of it and she so busy! And Cleo had a new basket made, all lined with blue satin, as near as possible like the description of the one in which the much-looked-for baby had one day long ago been tragically placed by her distracted mother. In Cleo's new basket were daily and even hourly being piled up the wonderful little things two loving girls deemed necessary for a baby's hope chest.

CHAPTER XXII

BESIDE THE POOL

IN the big gymnasium an air of almost electrified activity made itself felt. Cleo had never seen anything just like this before, in spite of all her peculiar experiences, and she just kept as close to Nellie as she could without attracting attention, for it seemed to her there was so much going on, so many girls vaulting "horses," so many others doing all sorts of hand springs and foot springs, some climbing from ring to ring so perilously high above the mattresses—all this made Cleo feel as if she too would presently be swallowed up in that activity and maybe find herself with a skillfully broken neck or very properly broken pair of arms.

So she stuck close to Nellie. Presto saw them as she emerged from the dressing room, but that was at the other end of the gym where the pool was situated, so the girls could only wave to the

young athlete and she promptly and pleasantly waved back.

"Come on," Nellie said to Cleo. "There's a little bench up at that end and it's the best place to watch the race. Hurry, before some one else gets the seats."

Dodging in and out of the groups of girls in their middies and bloomers or in their close-fitting swimming suits, the two non-participants managed to reach the bench Nellie was anxious to get to. A number of the girls knew Nellie and gave her friendly hails, but Cleo was a stranger here and she realized that this was the very place she most wanted to be acquainted in. A girls' gym, with happy, lively girls playing games that brought them health, exercising in a way that was a delight as well as an aid to happiness and all the other conspicuous features of a girl's gym, were now suddenly shown in this real, living picture portrayed before her, and it fascinated Cleo.

"Isn't it wonderful!" she kept whispering to Nellie. "I'm going to join this class just the very first thing."

"It's lots better than fancy dancing, don't you think so?" practical Nellie remarked. To which Cleo gave unspoken agreement.

"Watch the girl swimmers; they're going to try their strokes," Nellie prompted next.

Girl after girl dropped gracefully into the beautifully clear green water of the pool, the color evidently being a reflection from the great glass dome in the high arch above.

There was no calling, no shouting, scarcely an audible exchange of voices around the white basined pool, for each girl was intent upon getting her own stroke, her own best tricks and her own particular skill into play, for the race and match would soon be called.

"See, there goes Presto!" Nellie was like a guide at a circus or some such functionary, for she kept pointing things out to Cleo, as quickly as the opportunity presented itself.

Cleo watched the girl they called Presto, saw her dive from the springboard, saw her swim up the pool like a graceful young mermaid, doing the Australian crawl, the overhand, the "trudg-con" and even the old-fashioned breast stroke, as she worked her muscles into condition, one sort of action relieving another.

But when the race was actually under way it was so confusing to Cleo she could hardly tell who was really ahead, when finally the trials were over and the match proper was on. But

Nellie was shouting and urging Presto on, clapping her hands and all but jumping into the pool in her attempts to inspire the popular contestant.

But when it was all over Presto had really won, had come out first, and was soon surrounded by such happy throngs, all their energy now released in vociferous congratulations that Nellie and Cleo were forced to stand aside and await their turn to talk with their favorite.

At last the crowds dispersed and the girl with the striped bath-robe tied around her wet suit sauntered over to where they waited. She said few words but they meant much, for Presto was not a talkative girl, and what she lacked in loquacity Cleo and Nellie more than supplied.

"I'm just crazy about it—all here," Cleo declared, "and I'm going to join. You're just wonderful! I guess you can do most every kind of stunt——"

"Oh, well, I should," interrupted Presto. "I was trained to, since I was a tiny little girl, you know." She smiled with those dark glittering eyes and she spoke with that echoing voice——

Cleo looked up at her suddenly. "You remind me so of some one I know," she ventured. "And when you get time, Presto, Nellie and I are going to take you into a little—well, sort of a plan we

are working out," Cleo faltered feeling rather silly at her feeble attempt.

"Oh, that will be fine," the other girl answered politely. "Don't you want to sit down?"

"But your wet suit," Nellie reminded her.

"Oh, that's nothing; it's almost dry now. Let's sit down here and talk a few minutes."

Making sure that the small Roman seat was dry enough for regular apparel, Presto seated her guests. Then she slipped to the edge of the pool to sit where she could dip her toes into the water. She seemed reluctant to give up the sport entirely, and as they talked she dipped her toes in and out, at length bringing both feet up to the edge and straightening them out directly in front of Nellie and Cleo.

It seemed as if sitting there each of the three girls found her own personality reflected in the big green pool. Not picked out in the mirror of water, but just emphasized there, each girl so different, each just herself framed in the splashed stone rim of the great basin and outlined by the peculiar surroundings.

In a vague way Cleo was conscious of this. She saw that Nellie was at ease there, accustomed to these big public hospitable places, that Presto actually luxuriated in the scene she seemed a real

part of. But Cleo herself, she alone was alien. This was what she had sacrificed to the idiosyncrasies of a whimsical Aunt Sylvia. To be made—made-to-order—as a polished young lady!

There was so much she had been longing to say to this girl for whom she had such an unaccountable admiration, but now that the chance had come, and they were alone there with just Nellie, Cleo felt how useless it would be to attempt confidence, until——

“Until she understands me better,” was Cleo’s concluding thought, the thought with which she banished the idea of telling Presto about her search for the lost girl.

Nellie talked brightly about many things, especially about the swimming class she expected to join and about a little song her music teacher was soon going to give her. But Cleo seemed suddenly to forget her social obligations—she didn’t feel a bit like talking; she just wanted to think.

Her eyes swept over the figure of the girl sitting on the edge of the pool. How strong she seemed! How her skin shone! It was so satiny. And yet there were no ugly muscles to be seen. A girl’s athletics do not in the least mar the beauty of her form but rather improve it, Cleo was thinking.

"Why so solemn, Cleo?" Nellie asked finally, for Cleo had been silent for quite a long time, really.

"Thinking," she answered, noting the effect of the all-important word.

"Don't think too hard," put in Presto. She was rubbing her foot a little and Nellie noticed it.

"Hurt your foot?" she asked. "Did you hit a crab or something?" she joked.

"No, that's my pet little mark there," she began but she got no further.

Cleo was up, so near the edge of the pool she could easily have slipped in.

"Oh!" she gasped, actually choking with excitement. "Presto, let me—see—that—mark!" She was stooping over the girl thus rudely pounced upon.

"Why, it's only——"

"It's a little queer-shaped red mark——" Nellie managed to interject, she, too, visibly excited.

"Tell me, please tell me, Presto!" begged Cleo, "Is that a—baby mark?"

"Yes, I've always had it," replied the bewildered Presto.

"Oh, listen!" choked Cleo, "and please don't

think we're crazy. But were you—ever adopted?"

"Yes, I was," again answered Presto, who was standing up now and had playfully put out her hands to protect herself from the eager girls. "Why?" she asked, quietly.

"Oh, you were! Were you ever at the Perry Personality House?" Cleo jerked out the words like little explosives.

"That's exactly where I came from," answered the smiling girl in the damp bath-robe.

"Then, you're *my* sister!" Cleo almost shouted. "Oh, didn't I tell you it would come true, Nellie?" she demanded to know. "You Presto! What's your real name?"

"The name that was pinned on the arm of my baby jacket was Nannie Kimball, but——"

"Nannie Kimball! My sister Nannie! Oh, hold me, both of you, or I'll drown myself with joy in that pool——"

"Please don't, not if you're my sister," objected Presto, who was taking the startling news as she took Cleo's jumps, with reserve and a certain calmness.

"Oh, but don't you see, Sister Nannie," panted poor, agitated Cleo, "it means so much. You have a darling little mother——"

"Is she—alive?" Now the agate brown eyes were glistening; now Nannie Kimball was awake!

"Oh, yes. Dress, do dress quickly while I phone," Cleo urged her. "We must get home. Nellie, help Nannie get ready. Isn't it easy to say Nannie? And the cutest name——"

And that was the end that was really the beginning of Cleo's detective work, for a happier reunited family than the one that gathered in the pretty apartment a little later that very day could neither be imagined nor dreamed of.

"I knew it," Cleo repeated to Nellie again and again.

"Of course you did," agreed the girl, who couldn't think of another word to say.

THE END

This Isn't All!

Would you like to know what became of the good friends you have made in this book?

Would you like to read other stories continuing their adventures and experiences, or other books quite as entertaining by the same author?

On the *reverse side* of the wrapper which comes with this book, you will find a wonderful list of stories which you can buy at the same store where you got this book.

Don't throw away the Wrapper

Use it as a handy catalog of the books you want some day to have. But in case you do mislay it, write to the Publishers for a complete catalog.

THE LILIAN GARIS BOOKS

**Attractively Bound. Illustrated. Individual Colored Wrappers.
Every Volume Complete in Itself.**

Lilian Garis is one of the writers who always wrote. She expressed herself in verse from early school days and it was then predicted that Lilian Mack would one day become a writer. Justifying this sentiment, while still at high school, she took charge of the woman's page for a city paper and her work there attracted such favorable attention that she left school to take entire charge of woman's work for the largest daily in an important Eastern city.

Mrs. Garis turned to girls' books directly after her marriage, and of these she has written many. She believes in girls, studies them and depicts them with pen both skilled and sympathetic.

CLEO'S MISTY RAINBOW

CLEO'S CONQUEST

BARBARA HALE: A DOCTOR'S DAUGHTER

BARBARA HALE AND COZETTE

GLORIA: A GIRL AND HER DAD

GLORIA AT BOARDING SCHOOL

JOAN: JUST GIRL

JOAN'S GARDEN OF ADVENTURE

CONNIE LORING'S AMBITION

CONNIE LORING'S DILEMMA

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK

AMY BELL MARLOWE'S BOOKS FOR GIRLS

Charming, Fresh and Original Stories

Illustrated. Wrappers Printed in Colors with individual design for each story

Miss Marlowe's books for girls are somewhat of the type of Miss Alcott and also Mrs. Meade; but all are thoroughly up-to-date and wholly American in scene and action. Good, clean absorbing tales that all girls thoroughly enjoy.

THE OLDEST OF FOUR ; Or, Natalie's Way Out.

A sweet story of the struggles of a live girl to keep a family from want.

THE GIRLS AT HILLCREST FARM ; Or, The Secret of the Rocks.

Relating the trials of two girls who take boarders on an old farm.

A LITTLE MISS NOBODY ; Or, With the Girls of Pinewood Hall.

Tells of a school girl who was literally a nobody until she solved the mystery of her identity.

THE GIRL FROM SUNSET RANCH ; Or, Alone in a Great City.

A ranch girl comes to New York to meet relatives she has never seen. Her adventures make unusually good reading.

WYN'S CAMPING DAYS ; Or, The Outing of the GO-AHEAD CLUB.

A tale of happy days on the water and under canvas, with a touch of mystery and considerable excitement.

FRANCES OF THE RANGES ; Or, The Old Ranchman's Treasure.

A vivid picture of life on the great cattle ranges of the West.

THE GIRLS OF RIVERCLIFF SCHOOL ; Or, Beth Baldwin's Resolve.

This is one of the most entertaining stories centering about a girl's school that has ever been written.

WHEN ORIOLE CAME TO HARBOR LIGHT.

The story of a young girl, cast up by the sea, and rescued by an old lighthouse keeper.

WHEN ORIOLE TRAVELED WESTWARD.

Oriole visits the family of a rich ranchman and enjoys herself immensely.

WHEN ORIOLE WENT TO BOARDING SCHOOL.

How this brave girl bears up under the most trying experiences, makes a very interesting story.

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS SERIES

By LAURA LEE HOPE

Author of the "Bobbsey Twins," "Bunny Brown" Series, Etc.

Uniform Style of Binding. Individual Colored Wrappers.
Every Volume Complete in Itself.

These are the tales of the various adventures participated in by a group of bright, fun-loving, up-to-date girls who have a common bond in their fondness for outdoor life, camping, travel and adventure. They are clean and wholesome and free from sensationalism.

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS OF DEEPPDALE

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS AT RAINBOW LAKE

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN A MOTOR CAR

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN A WINTER CAMP

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN FLORIDA

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS AT OCEAN VIEW

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN ARMY SERVICE

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS ON PINE ISLAND

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS AT THE HOSTESS
HOUSE

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS AT BLUFF POINT

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS AT WILD ROSE LODGE

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN THE SADDLE

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS AROUND THE CAMP-
FIRE

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS ON CAPE COD

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS AT FOAMING FALLS

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS ALONG THE COAST

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS AT SPRING HILL FARM

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK

THE BLYTHE GIRLS BOOKS

By LAURA LEE HOPE

Individual Colored Wrappers and Text Illustrations by

THELMA GOOCH

Every Volume Complete in Itself

The Blythe girls, three in number, were left alone in New York City. Helen, who went in for art and music, kept the little flat uptown, while Margy, just out of a business school, obtained a position as a private secretary and Rose, plain-spoken and businesslike, took what she called a "job" in a department store.

THE BLYTHE GIRLS : HELEN, MARGY AND ROSE

A fascinating tale of real happenings in the great metropolis.

THE BLYTHE GIRLS : MARGY'S QUEER INHERITANCE

The Girls had a peculiar old aunt and when she died she left an unusual inheritance.

THE BLYTHE GIRLS : ROSE'S GREAT PROBLEM

Rose, still at work in the big department store, is one day faced with the greatest problem of her life.

THE BLYTHE GIRLS : HELEN'S STRANGE BOARDER

Helen goes to the assistance of a strange girl, whose real identity is a puzzle. Who the girl really was comes as a tremendous surprise.

THE BLYTHE GIRLS : THREE ON A VACATION

The girls go to the country for two weeks—and fall in with all sorts of curious and exciting happenings.

THE BLYTHE GIRLS : MARGY'S SECRET MISSION

Of course we cannot divulge the big secret, but nevertheless the girls as usual have many exciting experiences.

THE BLYTHE GIRLS : ROSE'S ODD DISCOVERY

A very interesting story, telling how Rose aided an old man in the almost hopeless search for his daughter.

THE BLYTHE GIRLS : THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HELEN

Helen calls on the art dealer on business and finds the old fellow has made a wonderful discovery.

THE BLYTHE GIRLS : SNOWBOUND IN CAMP

An absorbing tale of winter happenings, full of excitement.

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK

CAROLYN WELLS BOOKS

Attractively Bound. Illustrated. Colored Wrappers.

THE MARJORIE BOOKS

Marjorie is a happy little girl of twelve, up to mischief, but full of goodness and sincerity. In her and her friends every girl reader will see much of her own love of fun, play and adventure.

MARJORIE'S VACATION
MARJORIE'S BUSY DAYS
MARJORIE'S NEW FRIEND
MARJORIE IN COMMAND
MARJORIE'S MAYTIME
MARJORIE AT SEACOTE

THE TWO LITTLE WOMEN SERIES

Introducing Dorinda Fayre—a pretty blonde, sweet, serious, timid and a little slow, and Dorothy Rose—a sparkling brunette, quick, elf-like, high tempered, full of mischief and always getting into scrapes.

TWO LITTLE WOMEN
TWO LITTLE WOMEN AND TREASURE
HOUSE
TWO LITTLE WOMEN ON A HOLIDAY

THE DICK AND DOLLY BOOKS

Dick and Dolly are brother and sister, and their games, their pranks, their joys and sorrows, are told in a manner which makes the stories "really true" to young readers.

DICK AND DOLLY
DICK AND DOLLY'S ADVENTURES

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

WESTERN STORIES FOR BOYS

By JAMES CODY FERRIS

Individual Colored Wrappers and Illustrations by

WALTER S. ROGERS

Each Volume Complete in Itself.

Thrilling tales of the great west, told primarily for boys but which will be read by all who love mystery, rapid action, and adventures in the great open spaces.

The Manley Boys, Roy and Teddy, are the sons of an old ranchman, the owner of many thousands of heads of cattle. The lads know how to ride, how to shoot, and how to take care of themselves under any and all circumstances.

The cowboys of the X Bar X Ranch are real cowboys, on the job when required but full of fun and daring—a bunch any reader will be delighted to know.

THE X BAR X BOYS ON THE RANCH
THE X BAR X BOYS IN THUNDER CANYON
THE X BAR X BOYS ON WHIRLPOOL RIVER
THE X BAR X BOYS ON BIG BISON TRAIL
THE X BAR X BOYS AT THE ROUND-UP
THE X BAR X BOYS AT NUGGET CAMP
THE X BAR X BOYS AT RUSTLER'S GAP

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK

THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

By FRANKLIN W. DIXON

Individual Colored Wrappers and Text Illustrations by

WALTER S. ROGERS

Every Volume Complete in Itself.

NO subject has so thoroughly caught the imagination of young America as aviation. This series has been inspired by recent daring feats of the air, and is dedicated to Lindbergh, Byrd, Chamberlain and other heroes of the skies.

**OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS; OR, TED
SCOTT'S DARING LONG-DISTANCE
FLIGHT**

**RESCUED IN THE CLOUDS; OR, TED
SCOTT, HERO OF THE AIR**

**OVER THE ROCKIES WITH THE AIR MAIL;
OR, TED SCOTT LOST IN THE WILDER-
NESS**

**FIRST STOP HONOLULU; OR, TED SCOTT
OVER THE PACIFIC**

**THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST FLYERS; OR,
TED SCOTT OVER THE WEST INDIES**

**SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE; OR, TED
SCOTT ON A SECRET MISSION**

**ACROSS THE PACIFIC; OR, TED SCOTT'S
HOP TO AUSTRALIA**

**THE LONE EAGLE OF THE BORDER;
OR, TED SCOTT AND THE DIAMOND
SMUGGLERS**

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK

GIRL SCOUTS SERIES

By LILLIAN ELIZABETH ROY

Author of the "Polly Brewster Books"

**Handsomely Bound. Colored Wrappers. Illustrated
Each Volume Complete in Itself.**

Here is a series that holds the same position for girls that the Tom Slade and Roy Blakeley books hold for boys. They are delightful stories of Girl Scout camp life amid beautiful surroundings and are filled with stirring adventures.

GIRL SCOUTS AT DANDELION CAMP

This is a story which centers around the making and the enjoying of a mountain camp, spiced with the fun of a lively troop of Girl Scouts. The charm of living in the woods, of learning woodcraft of all sorts, of adventuring into the unknown, combine to make a busy and an exciting summer for the girls.

GIRL SCOUTS IN THE ADIRONDACKS

New scenery, new problems of camping, association with a neighboring camp of Boy Scouts, and a long canoe trip with them through the Fulton Chain, all in the setting of the marvelous Adirondacks, bring to the girls enlargement of horizon, new development, and new joys.

GIRL SCOUTS IN THE ROCKIES

On horseback from Denver through Estes Park as far as the Continental Divide, climbing peaks, riding wild trails, canoeing through canyons, shooting rapids, encountering a landslide, a summer blizzard, a sand storm, wild animals, and forest fires, the girls pack the days full with unforgettable experiences.

GIRL SCOUTS IN ARIZONA AND NEW MEXICO

The Girl Scouts visit the mountains and deserts of Arizona and New Mexico. They travel over the old Sante Fe trail, cross the Painted Desert, and visit the Grand Canyon. Their exciting adventures form a most interesting story.

GIRL SCOUTS IN THE REDWOODS

The girls spend their summer in the Redwoods of California and incidentally find a way to induce a famous motion picture director in Hollywood to offer to produce a film that stars the Girl Scouts of America.

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott Series

BY LEO EDWARDS

**Durably Bound. Illustrated. Individual Colored Wrappers.
Every Volume Complete in Itself.**

Hundreds of thousands of boys who laughed until their sides ached over the weird and wonderful adventures of Jerry Todd and his gang demanded that Leo Edwards, the author, give them more books like the Jerry Todd stories with their belt-bursting laughs and creepy shivers. So he took Poppy Ott, Jerry Todd's bosom chum and created the Poppy Ott Series, and if such a thing could be possible—they are even more full of fun and excitement than the Jerry Todds.

THE POPPY OTT SERIES

POPPY OTT AND THE STUTTERING PARROT
POPPY OTT AND THE SEVEN LEAGUE STILTS
POPPY OTT AND THE GALLOPING SNAIL
POPPY OTT'S PEDIGREED PICKLES

THE JERRY TODD BOOKS

JERRY TODD AND THE WHISPERING MUMMY
JERRY TODD AND THE ROSE-COLORED CAT
JERRY TODD AND THE OAK ISLAND TREASURE
JERRY TODD AND THE WALTZING HEN
JERRY TODD AND THE TALKING FROG
JERRY TODD AND THE PURRING EGG
JERRY TODD IN THE WHISPERING CAVE

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK

THE POLLY BREWSTER SERIES

By LILLIAN ELIZABETH ROY

**Durably Bound. Illustrated. Colored Wrappers.
Every Volume Complete in Itself.**

A delightful series for girls in which they will follow Polly and Eleanor through many interesting adventures and enjoyable trips to various places in the United States, Europe and South America.

POLLY OF PEBBLY PIT

POLLY AND ELEANOR

POLLY IN NEW YORK

POLLY AND HER FRIENDS ABROAD

POLLY'S BUSINESS VENTURE

POLLY'S SOUTHERN CRUISE

POLLY IN SOUTH AMERICA

POLLY IN THE SOUTHWEST

POLLY IN ALASKA

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

Childrens' Favorites Series

Attractively Bound.

Individual Colored Wrappers.

Every Volume Complete in Itself.

From the wide field of young peoples' classics, these favorite books have been selected because of their wonderful popularity in every home where children are. In this series they appear in a new fresh dress with beautiful jackets in full color.

For Children of Every Age

AESOP'S FABLES.....	Aesop
ALICE IN WONDERLAND.....	Lewis Carroll
BLACK BEAUTY.....	Anna Sewell
BUDGE AND TODDIE	John Habberton
A CHILD'S HISTORY OF ENGLAND.....	Dickens
COURTSHIP OF MILES STANDISH.....	Henry W. Longfellow
EVANGELINE.....	Henry W. Longfellow
HANS BRINKER.....	Mary Mapes Dodge
HEIDI.....	Johanna Spyri
HELEN'S BABIES.....	John Habberton
HIAWATHA.....	Henry W. Longfellow
THE LITTLE LAME PRINCE.....	Miss Mulock
PINOCCHIO.....	C. Collodi
ROBINSON CRUSOE.....	Daniel Defoe
SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON.....	Johann Wyss
TALES FROM SHAKESPEARE....	Charles and Mary Lamb
TREASURE ISLAND	Robert Louis Stevenson

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK



09-AGV-022

